

GUY'S MARRIAGE

BY HENRY GRÉVILLE.



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GUY'S MARRIAGE;

OR,

THE SHADOW OF A SIN.

BY HENRY GRÉVILLE.

AUTHOR OF "DOSIA," "SAVELI'S EXPIATION," "MARRYING OFF A DAUGHTER,"
"THE PRINCESS OGHROF," "MARKOP," "THE TRIALS OF RAISSA," "DOURNOP,"
"STLVIE'S RETROTHED," "GABRIELLE," "BONNE-MARIE," "LUCIE RODEY,"
"XENIE'S INHERITANCE," "PRETTY COUNTESS ZINA," "A FRIEND,"
"PHILOMENE'S MARRIAGES," "SONIA," "TANIA'S PERIL."

TRANSLATED BY MARY NEAL SHERWOOD.

"GUY'S MARRIAGE: OR, THE SHADOW OF A SIN," Henry Gréville's latest and best novel, is a strong and absorbing romance in its gifted author's most telling vein. It appeals particularly to ladies, for it is the unvarnished record of a woman's life. The heroine is clever and quick, but is not beyond the reach of temptation, and the uncertainty as to what her fate will be is so skilfully maintained that the reader is kept on the *qui vive* to the last. Her husband is a sham, but a good-natured one, and Monsieur de Fresnes, who supplies the element of danger, is a character drawn with a master hand. Mullan comes very near Zola's creations, and imparts a great deal of vitality to the novel. The plot is well woven, and the incidents all make their mark, one of them, the life-boat scene, being exceedingly stirring. There is some humor in the book, but the author deals mainly with the serious side of human nature. "GUY'S MARRIAGE; OR, THE SHADOW OF A SIN," will abundantly repay all who read it.

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CHAPTER I.

A HORTICULTURAL EXHIBITION.

"IT is thus, gentlemen, in concentrating our efforts that we coöperate for the happiness and prosperity of our glorious France!"

The gentle applause of good society which so much resembles the sound of rain pattering upon the leaves of a tree, now followed. This applause was accompanied by discreet bravos: then less quick of comprehension, the horticulturists followed, with a loud clapping of their big hands, just as the gloved fingers ceased to manifest their approbation. Then these last, not

wishing to evince less warmth, began again, and the result was an enthusiastie salvo from all together.

The orator was about to bow as actors do on the stage, but he suddenly saw that this would be ridiculous, and taking up the list of prizes began to read in his deep, rich voice.

"I congratulate you, my dear, your husband speaks extremely well—as well as he talks. He is the stuff out of which orators are made, I assure you. Is his speech an impromptu?"

Madame de Dreux was a little embarrassed; a slight color rose in her delicate cheeks, and she answered the elderly lady who addressed her with some little hesitation:

"I do not know—I suppose—"

"Ah! it is an impromptu, of course. It is very easy to see that. A discourse learned by heart, could never be uttered with such ease, nor in a tone which is both dignified and gay. Monsieur de Dreux is certainly highly favored by Destiny!"

"I beg leave to second that remark," said a tall young man, who was slightly bald, "he is a happy husband, a happy father, and the happy President of the Horticultural Society of Remécý-Sur-Luise."

Madame de Dreux smiled, and her face cleared of the slight cloud which had rested upon it.

"Satirical, as usual," she said, "but your raillery does not affect me, sir, I assure you!"

"I should be extremely unhappy, Madame, if that were the case; I could not—"

"Endure to hold my tongue!" concluded the lady, interrupting him.

They all laughed and a loud and indignant "Hush!" was heard from an inhabitant of Remécý-Sur-Luise who, standing on a chair, had made an ear-trumpet of his hand in order to catch the names which were pronounced at the lower end of the tent, and now turned toward the speakers with an irritated air. His round good-natured face changed its expression as soon as he saw Madame de Dreux; he hastily descended from his elevated position and stammered forth:

"Oh! Madame, if I had known that it was you—"

The lady smiled and nodded her head slightly, while the excellent baker, having by this time gotten over the fear that he had lost a good customer, again placed his hand to his huge ear, but with a certain respectful deference for his noble neighbor; presently he discreetly retired, feeling that his place was not among such distinguished people.

"You are the Queen of this district!" said the bald young man.

"The Queen of my trades-people, you mean," answered Madame de Dreux. "But I beg of you, sir, allow me to hear the names of the laureats—"

"You know them! Are you not in the secrets of the gods?"

"I? By no means!"

"Does not your husband consult you in his decisions? Is it not you who virtually presides at the meetings of the Horticultural Society, the Temper-

ance Society, of the Society for the Cultivation of Snails, and, in fact, of all the Societies of which your husband is more or less the President?"

Madame de Dreux made a little negative sign, which if tinged with haughtiness, was yet extremely polite. It must have required at least ten generations of the best educated men and women in the world to endow this young provincial with her high-bred air.

Mullan bowed half respectfully, half jestingly, which was his usual manner.

"It is a great pity, Madame," he began, and if I had the honor—"

A quick movement made by the lady warned him to go no further; he continued, however, apparently without making a change in what he had intended to say.

"—Of having within my reach so sage a counsellor, I certainly should not omit consulting her."

Blanche de Dreux turned away her head, and at the same moment, the aged Comtesse Praxis, who sat next her said, as she examined the scene through her glass:

"Look, my dear child, they are offering your husband an absolute ovation!"

In fact, the young President of the Horticultural Society had left the Tribune and was slowly advancing toward them, escorted by a battalion of the fortunate. He stopped occasionally to lean over the flowers and fruits artistically grouped, addressing his companions with flattering words at the same time.

"Does he not look like a Minister distributing

crosses?" said Mullan, not to the younger lady, but to the Comtesse Praxis, who was by no means inclined to impose silence upon him. "He is trying his future *métier*. He is a trifle awkward, to be sure; too smiling, and not half stiff enough. He has not yet learned the way of tickling the self-love of the Elector without wounding that of the step-father and the son-in-law of this same Elector—but all this will come, Comtesse, will it not, and he will be a Deputy in good time? Now look at him! Just see the grace with which he drinks in the odors of that prize melon. Ah! that is just what I was afraid of. Malembéré offers him that prize melon. He is a good fellow, that Malembéré, but very much wanting in tact. Malembéré can't keep that melon in his arms much longer, for it weighs at least twenty pounds. What on earth will he do with it? Good Heavens! he has laid it in the hands of our good friend de Dreux!"

The Comtesse laughed heartily, unable to restrain herself longer.

"Hush!" she said, as soon as she could speak, "you have not the smallest sentiment—"

"In regard to what, dear Comtesse, am I so void of sentiment? Have I not the sentiment of friendship in the highest degree? God be praised! we can breathe again, and De Dreux, also. A faithful servant, your footman, Madame, has carried away the melon. Malembéré evidently wishes it to figure in the triumphal procession of the President of the Horticultural Society. De Dreux refuses, Malembéré insists!

It is all right, Madame, you will find the melon in your carriage!"

"Mullan!" said the Comtesse, drying her eyes in which the tears stood by reason of her hearty laughter, "I forbid you to say another word."

"And why, dear Comtesse? Is not laughter the distinguishing characteristic of man? Now look at my friend De Dreux as he continues his official promenade. Yes, it is just as I supposed. Malembre took the initiative, and now you will see the result; baskets of fruit are being heaped up at the feet of your husband, Madame. Unhappy looking apricots, defective peaches—pears—"

"Tell me, why do you always laugh at my husband?" said Blanche de Dreux, in a low voice, as she made a little hole in the sand with her umbrella. "Is it to give me pleasure?"

Mullan looked steadfastly into the blue eyes which sought his own: they were not absolutely blue eyes, after all; they were of a soft gray with violet shadows, and constantly changing. At this precise moment they were steel color, cold and calm as that metal. The young man dropped his own.

"If it be not to please me, why should you try to make your friend ridiculous?"

"It is one of the peculiarities of my nature, Madame," answered De Mullan, who had regained his self-possession. "You have steel gray eyes, and I—well, I find it absolutely necessary to laugh at my neighbor."

"I beg of you, sir, never to laugh at my husband in my presence—it wounds my dignity and my affection."

She had spoken in a very low voice, without anger, without any affectation of haughtiness, and Mullan felt very keenly that this woman could never have any love for him. She had drawn with the point of her umbrella a small, almost imperceptible line on the sand, and this line which separated them was the shadow of another equally delicate but more impassable which she had drawn between them.

He bowed slightly, the place admitting of no especial expansion; but this commonplace salutation placed him at the feet of Blanche.

"I should be disconsolate were I to cause you the smallest annoyance," he said, an undertone of true repentance piercing his simple words.

She made a little sign with her head, and on her lips was a faint, approving smile. Mullan turned his eyes inward, while Blanche addressed her companion, and saw that his love for her was rapidly dying. Then he looked at Madame de Dreux again, who suddenly seemed separated from him by a million terrestrial atmospheres.

"What a fool I was to suppose I could make this woman love me!" he said, to himself. "Does one ever try to melt marble? My poor Mullan, you have enough to laugh at in yourself without ridiculing others. And suppose I had succeeded in making her love me? What should I have gained? Since she has fallen into De Dreux' hands, let him keep her. If he could only appreciate her! Suppose he had heard what I said just now. Pshaw! he would not have

understood, and very likely would have been pleased. Is she not fulfilling her duty?"

With a slight shrug of his shoulders he released himself from these annoying thoughts, and presenting his arm to Madame de Dreux, said, in an indifferent tone, "Will you take a turn through the Exposition?"

She accepted silently, and they began a slow progress through all those delights known as a Floral Exposition.

The vast tent protected those green-house plants which cannot bear the coolness of the night, as well as the velvet gloxinias, which dread the heat of the day. The paths of hard, dry gravel were bordered with lycopodeums and ferns—the open sides of the tent displayed an admirable mass of roses, the glory and the pride of careful culture. The roses glittered in the sunshine like precious jewels. In the centre were the deep red, looking like gigantic rubies—pale, faint-tinted Malmaisons—amber-colored Gloire de Dijon—and soft, yellow Marshall Niels made for the first a fragrant frame. The Exposition of Ramécy-Sur-Luise was indeed very beautiful, but fêtes lasting only a day are fully appreciated only by the most refined natures.

Blanche wandered around the parterre, her hand lightly resting on Mullan's arm. She had opened her white silk parasol, lined with rose color, which imparted a soft glow to her complexion, generally too pale. She dreamed as she went, lulled by a distant melody, by the perfume of the flowers and the

mere pleasure of existence, but the melody was a sad one.

"Do you wish to hear a harsh truth?" said Mullan, suddenly. "Do you know that it is on your husband's arm that you ought to be to-day, and not on mine?"

A burning blush inundated the face of his companion. Even her shell-like ears were suffused.

"You are right," she answered, "take me back to the tent."

He obeyed, asking himself why he had spoken, but on the whole pleased that he had done so, as he had a feeling that his frankness had reinstated him in the opinion of this honest, simple-hearted woman.

"But what difference does that make?" he said to himself. "You know very well, simpleton, that you have no desire to win her heart."

A displeasing vision flashed into Mullan's mind. He remembered old forgotten troubles—a sulky, ill-tempered woman, who never indulged in the softening influence of tears—a man who, bored to death, had not a word to say; and he thrust from him these recollections so unsuited to the presence of the lovely creature on his arm.

"It is always the way!" was the next thought of this man of the world, and he felt half inclined to fold a protecting arm around Blanche as mothers envelop their infants when they hear of the misfortunes of other children.

Suddenly he adjusted his eyeglass, and looked

around. Repressing an exclamation of annoyance, he turned into a less frequented avenue.

"But my husband is not there," objected Madame de Dreux.

"No—just at present he is doing the honors of the Exposition to a *belle dame*, who has come from Paris for the occasion, at least I believe so."

Blanche extended her white throat, and saw her husband with a lady who seemed to be about thirty-five, who laughed a great deal, and showed very handsome white teeth. She was tall, well dressed, and entirely at her ease.

"I do not know her," said Madame de Dreux. "I wish these ceremonies were over, for I have a very bad headache, and I long for the cool dark rooms of the château. Oh! if I were only there!"

"Shall I order your carriage?" asked Mullan.

"I do not think it is here yet. I sent it back for my son. I do not know either if my husband is yet ready to go."

"Dear Madame," said her companion, "listen to the advice of a disinterested friend: The sooner you accustom yourself to go home from any and all entertainments, at any hour most agreeable to yourself, the better, otherwise I shall find you some fine day, about four o'clock in the morning, in an utterly exhausted condition, waiting in a door-way, while my amiable and charming friend lounges in the smoking-room, or chats over the supper table. The sooner you accustom him to a certain amount of independence on your

part, the better for you—perhaps he will not even perceive the change if you make it gradually.”

Blanche did not reply. The sad echoes in her heart repeated these words, and she found them very bitter. Was this true? Was it really necessary to give up the blind and mute submission which she had always shown him. Could it be possible that her husband was unconscious of this devotion, not merely to his wishes but to his caprices? A devotion which had cost her nothing since it made a portion of her love.

“Kindly see if my carriage is there,” she said, abruptly, dropping his arm.

Mullan, without replying, went toward the gate. The large *calèche*, with armorial bearings on the panels, occupied the most conspicuous place in the front row. Its sole occupant was a pompous looking nurse, wearing a cap trimmed with a fluted border of fine Valenciennes, ornamented with clusters of narrow ribbons, the family colors, as were the cockades worn by the horses. On the knees of the nurse lay a bundle of fine embroideries—these embroideries enveloping the heir of the De Dreux house, who was sleeping peacefully in the shadows of the tall elm trees bordering the road.

The young man made a sign, and while the *calèche* came up to the gate, he went back for Blanche, who was talking with her friend, Madame Praxis.

“Allow me to put you in your carriage,” said Mullan, with an air of careless courtesy.

Without replying, Blanche took the arm he offered, said adieu to her friend, and went toward the gate.

"Have you many people to dinner?" asked Mullan.

"Yes, a great many. Are you coming?"

"If you condescend to ask me."

"I thought my husband had already asked you?"

"So he has, but I prefer to be invited by you."

"It seems to me that you are becoming very ceremonious," said Blanche, with a certain sharpness in her voice. She was intensely irritated with everything and everybody, even herself.

"Pray Madame, attribute this hesitation only to the great fear I have of displeasing you."

"You were not so cautious an hour ago," answered Blanche, hastily.

"An hour ago I had, perhaps, less need of your esteem and of my own, Madame," answered Mullan, looking straight before him. "Please imagine that path, winding among the roses, to have been my road from Damascus, and kindly forget the follies which I have committed toward you, and see in me only, for the future, the most devoted friend and servant."

He terminated this singular harangue with a profound bow, just as Blanche placed her dainty slipper on the step of the carriage. The footman leaped to the side of the coachman, the crowd separated, hats were lifted, and the great horses, holding their beriboned heads high and champing their bits, dashed off. Madame de Dreux bowed to the right and to the left like a queen amid her subjects. The carriage took its rapid way toward a château standing not very far away, on the shores of the Luise.

As Mullan went back to the tent, he met his friend de Dreux—alone this time—that is, if a man may be called alone to whom twenty people come up to speak one after the other. The lady with whom he had been walking had disappeared among the crowd, which a special train brought from Paris every year to this fête.

“And where is my wife?” said Guy de Dreux, to Mullan.

“She has just gone,” answered that gentleman, with an air of artless satisfaction.

“Gone! How? Alone? On foot?”

“By no means. She went in her very handsome carriage—escorted by your son and his superb nurse.”

“She went in the *calèche*? And pray—how am I to get home?”

“To be sure! How are you to get home? On foot I imagine.”

“On foot. On a day like this!” answered Guy, in a much disgusted tone. “What on earth got into Blanche; she is generally so thoughtful. She ought to have sent to ask—”

“Permission? I assure you she thought of doing so, but you were at the moment walking with such a beautiful woman, that—

Guy shrugged his shoulders in a vexed way.

“She had no need to come here,” he murmured.

“I don’t know what the devil sent her—”

“Your wife, do you mean?”

“No, no,—not my wife. Mullan, I really believe you are laughing at me!”

"Certainly I am. And in doing so, give the best possible proof of the affection I feel for you; for I assure you that I don't take the trouble to laugh at everybody!"

De Dreux meditated a moment, and then said sadly:

"Don't you see that I shall be obliged to go home on foot, through all this dust—and it makes me appear very ridiculous beside. By the way, was the melon in the carriage?"

"I do not think it was; I did not see it."

"And those horticulturists who took the prizes, whom I have invited to dinner—what will they think if the melon does not appear?"

"Malembre will never forgive you, and when you are nominated you will not have his vote."

"Nominated for what?" asked Guy, with an air of astonishment.

"It does not matter what, but we will say Deputy, if that suits you."

"What nonsense!" answered de Dreux. "Deputy, indeed! But these provincials are absurd—if their fruit is not praised all during dinner, we shall have a standing quarrel with the whole town."

"Then," said Mullan, "I offer you my modest equipage, my bachelor tilbury, your wife having asked me to meet M. Malembre. And as my generosity is absolutely limitless, I will also carry the melon, and everybody will be pleased."

Monsieur de Dreux was about to reply in words which might not have been altogether agreeable to his

laughing friend, when his face suddenly cleared, for at the extremity of the long avenue, he beheld a carriage coming toward him as fast as possible. He watched it with the air of the proprietor.

“Good child!” he murmured, “Blanche has thought of sending back the carriage!”

“Upon my word!” thought Mullan, “you are exactly like a horse that must be beaten to make him leap. Leap! my friend, leap; marriage is a succession of five-barred fences, and I can not always be near you to use the whip at the right moment.

CHAPTER II.

A DETERMINED WOMAN.

THE dinner was splendid. All the delights of a repast ordered from Chevet, to which the *chef* of the château had disdained to add any finishing touches. This last individual liked to work only for appreciative persons, for those who could understand him, and as to Malembre and the other heroes of the day, he said, "the dinner from Chevet is quite good enough for them."

Madame de Dreux presided with calm grace; if she felt no enthusiasm, she at least showed no ennui. These most excellent people in their pride at sitting at this table, and in their wish to be agreeable, certainly said some very strange things. They might have been amusing, if they had allowed themselves to be natural, but this they dared not be.

All the horticulturists who had taken prizes were not from Malembre. There were two who lived near by, and who had devoted to the culture of roses the end of hard worked lives; one of them, a retired professor from a large school in Paris, the other a captain of engineers, who had been compelled by gout—which he insisted on calling rheumatism—to renounce all active exertion except that of horticulture, which he

could direct from a seat under a tree in his garden, and to whom his roses were his only delight.

These two cultivated and intellectual men, both worshipped their young hostess, and cherished for each other a certain mild jealousy which they manifested by an innocent rivalry of little attentions and superannuated madrigals.

Blanche had long since forbidden Mullan to indulge in any jests upon these excellent old men, whom he insisted on calling "her china dogs," because of their tiny houses which stood opposite each other with the narrow valley of the Luise between them. A woman of twenty-two can preside even at an official dinner without fatigue; generally, too, Blanche found considerable amusement in such ceremonies, but on the evening of which we write she was a little sad without well knowing why.

The wives of these gentlemen had been rigorously excluded from the invitation, and the Countess Praxis, who knew every human being in Ramécy, and also within a radius of five leagues, was the only lady who shared the duties of that long dinner with the hostess.

Mullan was witty, Guy de Dreux was amiable. The Comtesse had a gracious word for every one in turn; the table was brilliant with its cut glass and old silver, and made still more charming by the baskets of flowers sent from the Exposition.

What was lacking to gratify the eyes, the mind and the vanity of Blanche? She could not have answered this question, but she was well aware that she rose from the table with great satisfaction.

Leaving Madame Praxis to do the honors of the salon, she herself took refuge in the cool and perfumed boudoir, in which she spent much of her time; two candles only were lighted on the mantel; it was not intended that her guests generally should find their way there. She uttered a long sigh—was it one of sadness or of relief? She could not have told herself, had any one asked. She threw herself into an arm-chair, but hardly was she seated than she rose again, and ringing the bell, stood waiting.

“Go and see how my son is,” she said to the servant who appeared.

The reply came back immediately:

“The young master was well, and sleeping soundly.”

She dismissed the servant, and went to the window, where she seated herself.

“What is the matter with me?” she said to herself, leaning her head on her hands with the sad face of one who realizes her unhappiness but is unable to define it. “Am I ill? Am I crazy? Why am I so miserable to-night?”

Tears stood in her eyes; she closed them, and prevented them from dropping, while she resolutely examined her present and her past, to discover the cause of her sorrow.

An orphan from her cradle, she had been educated in an excellent school where her fortune and her name assured her every consideration, and where her affectionate disposition had won all hearts. When her

education was completed she went to the house of her guardian, Monsieur Grosmont.

That gentleman had for a wife a being who might have been especially created by Providence for the difficult rôle which she was called upon to play. Gentle and inoffensive, she was quite willing to take off her dress and remain quietly at home when some unexpected accident had prevented her going to a ball—or she was equally willing to go and stay until five o'clock in the morning.

She was never much amused anywhere, but no one had ever heard her complain of ennui. She was a model chaperon, with excellent manners, superior education and an amiable disposition. If the rich treasures of the young girl's heart were never called forth by that lady, she at least never gave Blanche the smallest annoyance.

There were two years of this happy life—social amusements in the best circles, a pleasant home among well-bred and cultivated people; then came the expectation of marrying some man who would bring her in exchange for her beauty and her dowry—rank and position—all this was only natural.

Two years, as we have said, had elapsed, when one evening—and as Blanche thought of that evening her color rose—when she was at the house of an elderly lady, whose quiet soirees ended at eleven, she met Guy de Dreux.

No one had mentioned Guy de Dreux to her as a desirable partner. He was not rich enough, conspicu-

ous enough, nor was he what is called "settled down."

The friends of this young girl expected her to make a brilliant match—she was to marry, if not a Prince, at least a Minister or an Ambassador to some brilliant court; never once did they imagine that she would marry a man without either position or fortune. What was Guy's small income, fifteen or twenty thousand francs only, compared to the two hundred thousand of which Blanche was the happy possessor.

And yet, when the eyes of the young heiress met those of Monsieur de Dreux, she felt a strange and new emotion.

"It is he whom I will love," she said to herself, "and I can never marry any other man than he who has made this great impression upon me to-night!"

She went home in a state of bewilderment, in which she hardly recognized herself.

Guy had not the smallest idea of the effect he had produced. He, as usual, contented himself with looking handsome.

The events of our story occurred at a period when the personal beauty of men was of great importance. Nowadays, we think far less of this possession, or at all events, we feign to attach less importance to it, but there was a time when a handsome man was much more sought after than an ugly one, although the latter might be intellectually far his superior,—this was a relic of the past, of which our equalizing century has done its best to rid itself.

Guy de Dreux was wonderfully handsome, manly and refined; his features, almost classic in their regularity, deserved to be cut in marble as the personification of that French race which too rarely gives us a perfect specimen — but occasionally produces an admirable example.

He was not especially proud of this superiority, for men pretended not to notice it, and women only spoke of it among themselves; he therefore had not been spoiled.

He was twenty-eight, and lived only for himself. Ambition was awakened later, and with it came a perception of the means he should adopt for its indulgence—but when Blanche first saw him—he simply wished to amuse himself.

He possessed one great gift, however, that of speech. He conversed charmingly, knew all that was going on, and told an anecdote with great cleverness. All dowagers adored him, but as yet he had obtained none of those successes which make a man socially conspicuous, and gives him many enemies—but are not enemies the invariable accompaniment of glory?

Guy was included in Madame de Grosmont's visiting list, and Blanche was therefore enabled to observe him at her ease, without attracting observation.

She was disillusionized. The young man's conversation held her enthralled for some time—long enough for the eyes of Madame de Grosmont to be fixed upon her with vague reproach.

But in this brief moment the young girl's fate was

decided. Guy seemed to her altogether perfect, and she cared little what the rest of the world thought. She loved Guy with all her heart, but perhaps still more with all her eyes. Not until a woman is thirty does she love with her soul; at eighteen she is carried away by appearances—they do not choose, they yield. Their motto is that of the ivy, “I die where I cling.”

Blanche was like this. When Guy’s hand touched hers in the contre-dance, she shivered from head to foot. This man should be her husband.

Guy was no coxcomb, but a man of twenty-eight is not long in discovering that he pleases a pretty girl.

Blanche, artless as she was, had enough of the coquetry, common to women, to make the young man madly in love, and at the same time persuade him that he was without hope.

When he was utterly desperate, and in the fashion of the day alluded to his departure for Algeria and the army, she went to her tutor:

“Monsieur de Dreux loves me,” she said, “and I love him. I should be very glad if you would give your consent to this marriage.”

Monsieur de Grosmont tumbled down from the clouds. He had never noticed the young man; he was too insignificant to attract his attention; he belonged to no ministry, he had no stable, and no political influence.

“Had Blanche lost her senses?” he asked. “How could she attach herself to a man so totally without merit?”

"But he has merit," answered the young girl, "and besides, that is my own affair. I merely wish you to inform yourself and me, my dear guardian, if he is, as I believe and hope, a man of strict honor. A blemish on his reputation would be the only obstacle to the execution of my project."

No one could say a word against Guy, this fact Monsieur de Grosmont was obliged to admit with profound regret. Some days later Monsieur de Dreux asked the hand of Mademoiselle de Saulx, which was granted by her guardian with a profound sigh, he thus fulfilling his duty to the very end.

When the report of the marriage was heard in society, the young fiancée received a bewildering succession of visits.

"My dear child!" said the prudent mothers, who thought more highly of a well-filled purse than of any Antinous in the world, "My dear child, you should have done better than this."

The Comtesse Praxis, who had been a beauty, and who loved beautiful things of all kinds, was the only one to defend the choice of the young girl.

"Upon my word!" she said to two or three of the most bitter, who took advantage of the absence of Blanche to pick her and her lover to bits. "Upon my word! one would think she had robbed you of something!"

Such an energetic defender silenced malevolent tongues for the moment, though later they made ample amends to themselves.

Blanche went to the altar surrounded with almost royal pomp, with the pride of a fiancée who bears priceless treasures to her lover, and with the humility of a woman who fears her own unworthiness, and feels that she merits not the love of him whom she thinks superior to all else in the world.

The first months of her marriage were to Blanche a perfect dream of bliss. It seemed to her that the day must come when she would awake to reality and find that Guy was not her husband.

Guy was the first and the last thought of this ingenuous nature; she clothed him with all the perfections which she wished him to have, she made him in her eyes a being above the rest of mankind. And as she spoke to no one of her thoughts and feelings, she encountered no detractors of her dear idol.

Monsieur de Dreux, still dazzled by the change in his life, not only allowed himself to be loved, but being an amiable person, and grateful to a certain degree to the fairy who lavished so much upon him, was attentive and tender, all the more so because he was really in love with his wife.

Their honeymoon, therefore, disappointed all the sinister prophets of evil, who would have liked to see discord reign in this youthful *ménage*.

Blanche had her brief hour of triumph—the first year of her marriage was enchantment; the second brought her a new joy, a new pride; she had a son. The birth of this child was to her a solemn event. Deprived herself of a parent's love, she felt an impera-

tive need to lavish on her child all that tenderness which she herself had never known.

Unfortunately she could not nurse him, and it hurt her sorely to trust him to any one but herself. But as the health of the infant demanded this sacrifice, she resigned herself to it all the more that her husband from the beginning had not encouraged her nursing the boy, although he had himself placed no obstacles in the way of her doing so. Edward was now three months old, and one of the most beautiful children in the world. Blanche had regained all her beauty and her health. Having reached this point in her reflections she stopped, refusing to go further at that time, for her guests must be wondering at her absence. She started up, and passing her handkerchief lightly over her face, was surprised to find that she had been weeping.

She went to the mirror, saw that her cheeks were burning and that her eyes were full of tears.

"I must be ill," she said to herself, as she arranged her hair, and the lace about her throat. "I must consult the doctor."

On her way to the salon she stopped short.

"Who was that woman with my husband?" she said to herself. "She was not beautiful."

This was but a passing thought, and she moved on at once. She entered the salon, full of lights and people, and there was no more time for thought.

CHAPTER III.

PLAIN WORDS.

GUY was in the smoking-room, horribly ennuyéd by a lecture he was receiving from his friend Mullan. The guests had deserted that room to crowd around the mistress of the house, for what was the good of dining at the château if they could not relate all that the *châtelaine* had done and said. These gentlemen well knew that their wives would not spare them the position of a pin, and in order to avoid the reproaches they anticipated, they applied themselves to a minute examination of the ribbons, pearls and laces worn by Madame de Dreux, as well as to the details of the furniture of the château. The description of the latter was certain to be a task of difficulty, by reason of their scanty knowledge of technical terms.

Fatigued by his duties as amphytryon, and still more fatigued by fine speeches, which since the morning he had lavished on all sides, Guy had thrown himself at full length on the divan.

"My dear fellow," said Mullan, "I cannot understand your conduct; it is unpardonable and unjustifiable!"

"Those are very long words!" said De Dreux, wearily.

"Not at all; I abhor long words, as you know perfectly well. But surely you will admit that on a day like this, the day of a village fête, whose every incident will remain in the memories of these provincials, as well as every word and gesture of yours, was hardly the time to walk about with that woman—Madame Lopez!"

"You are mad!" cried De Dreux, raising himself to a sitting posture.

"Do you mean that I am lacking in respect toward her? She always was like a horse to me, with her wide nose and long white teeth. But this is not the question—I merely wish to ask you, if it is not in bad taste to appear in public with that woman on your arm, and allow Madame de Dreux to be seen with me?"

Compelled to reply, Guy exclaimed in a sulky tone:

"Ah! my friend, how could I help it? Were there not certain conditions made at the time of our rupture?"

"Do you mean that you allowed her to make conditions? Do you imagine that your wife would approve of that?"

"I trust, Mullan, that you did not awaken her suspicions; of course she has no idea that Madame Lopez—"

"She has no idea of anything," answered Mullan, "only she was very sad, and I think she is still."

Guy smiled with an air of self-satisfaction.

"Ah! That is of no consequence; she will be all right soon."

"As soon as you return to your conjugal shackles," said Mullan, sarcastically. "You are right. Only let me advise you not to leave them again."

"Upon my word! Mullan, I am out of all patience with you, to-day," cried Guy, now starting to his feet. "What on earth is the matter with you?"

"It is only that I have an attack of goodness," answered the young man.

"And are such attacks common with you?"

"Up to this time I should say not; but, after a while, I trust it will be my normal condition."

"Then I am afraid your normal condition will be a stupid one. Come, now, and let us face these good villagers once more.

Mullan stopped his friend as he reached the door. "By the way, did you commit your speech to memory?"

"Zounds! man—"

"Did you write it yourself?"

"Whom else was likely to do so?"

"That is very true. It was not good enough to be attributed to any one but you."

"You mean then, that my speech was not good?"

"None too good. It was inflated, pompous and hollow. There were phrases but no ideas, and even the phrases were such as have been heard forever. I know very well that these people down here like such speeches, but in composing yours you ought to have thought that you might have one person of cultivation, myself, for example, among your audience."

Guy, who was rapidly losing his temper, turned around as he reached the threshold.

"It was not my fault," he said, "I could find nothing better!"

"Which is precisely what I thought," Mullan was on the point of saying, but he restrained himself. Why should he fret his friend any more?

In thus refraining he proved his strength of mind, for among those who indulge in prompt repartee, how many are there who allow themselves to be deterred from its exercise by the fear of wounding their nearest and dearest?

Monsieur de Dreux was standing in the centre of the salon distributing friendly hand-shakes and compliments, for the hour was late and the Rémaçois were about to retire.

Mullan stood near the door, where he could see Blanche, who was also accomplishing with equal fervor her duties as mistress of the house. She had a flush on her cheeks and a smile on her lips, but the flush was too deep and her smile was constrained.

"Poor little woman!" said the man of the world to himself; "it seems to me that women who love their husbands and accept them as eagles, must, as a rule, marry simpletons! Now then, is De Dreux a simpleton? Not yet; but in ten years he will be one. And I, what am I? Who will ever believe that I this day have made a great sacrifice? Have I not been a greater fool than any of them to-day?"

In spite of this misgiving, he whistled a succession of merry airs as he drove home, keeping time to the measured trot of his good horse.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ARRIVAL.

THE next afternoon, Blanche was with her son and his nurse, taking their daily walk in the gardens, when she saw through the trees a lady and gentleman at the further end of the avenue leading to the château.

It was easy to see that the new comers did not belong in that vicinity, for the Rémaçois never walked so fast or so steadily. Besides, the inhabitants of the neighboring country houses were really too far away to undertake so long a walk in such heat. Somewhat puzzled, Blanche returned to the château, and from the windows of the salon saw the visitors ascending the steps.

She uttered a little shriek of joy and rushed out to meet them.

"Madeline!" she cried, embracing the young lady over and over again, "Madeline! At last!"

"My husband!" said Madeline, presenting her son.

"You are indeed welcome," answered Madame de Dreux, extending her hand cordially to this husband so briefly presented. "But why," she continued, "did you not let us know, we would have sent a carriage to the station; and your trunks?"

"They are at the station," answered the young

stranger. "We are only making you a little call, and as we had only a couple of hours, thought it best not to disarrange your household affairs."

"Two hours! It was not worth while to come for that time!" said Blanche. "I won't hear one word of your leaving to-day, nor this week—nor ever. Give me the checks for your luggage, if you please, and in an hour you will be comfortably established here, with your belongings about you."

Madeline's husband obeyed without resistance. Blanche gave the necessary orders to a servant, and then took her friends to her favorite abiding place, the little green salon.

"Whence come you?" she said. "When did you leave Paris? Where are you going? Your silence, Madeline, has been so complete since the letter announcing your marriage, that I thought, at least, you were in China or Australia."

Madame Lecomte smiled, as if highly delighted.

"We tried to make ourselves forgotten," she said, "lest sorrow should be tempted to remember and visit us."

Monsieur Lecomte and his wife exchanged a look so full of affection, that Blanche saw that they were perfectly happy.

After a few moments conversation, she herself showed them to the room she had selected for them, and left them there.

The arrival of her friends did Blanche an immense amount of good. In talking with this friend of her

childhood and youth, she would undoubtedly be able to find a name for her sadness, and possibly succeed in driving it away. If she suffered, it was of course from the merest chimeras, for she had not the smallest reason for sadness; a little light, the light which comes from long talks with an intimate friend, would dissipate the shadows brooding over her troubled soul.

It was with sincere joy that Blanche informed her husband of the arrival of her friends, and of her hope that they would make a long stay at the château. Guy received this intelligence with his usual amiability. He liked to see the château full of guests. "The lawns," he said, "were made that the long trains of women's dresses should sweep over them, and the carriages were of no other use than to take about a laughing crowd." It did not matter to him who the guests were; he enjoyed their companionship and treated them with that indiscriminate politeness and cordiality which the inexperienced are apt to take for friendship, and which is too often the mask for indifference.

He knew Gerard Lecomte but slightly, for that gentleman lived in a circle which was less frivolous than his own and more domestic. Lecomte was not satisfied with his position as the grandson of an engineer of great celebrity under the first empire; he employed the fortune bequeathed him by his father, who had acquired it in trade, in studies and investigations which were certain some day to make his name glorious.

Naturally, the points of sympathy between Guy de Dreux and himself were few; but in regard to this Guy did not give himself much uneasiness.

Provided a man could ride, could smoke and could use a gun in the autumn, Guy was fully satisfied. More than this, too, Madeline's presence, whom he heartily liked, could not but be agreeable to him. While doing justice to the superior qualities of Blanche, Guy could not but contrast her reserve of manner and occasional sadness with Madeline's laughing gayety.

As he was a philosopher, he had frequently said to himself that a man could not have everything, and his affection for Blanche had not suffered, although as a general rule he preferred to converse with women less serious than Madame de Dreux.

The dinner was charming. The dining-room of this modern château, lighted by enormous windows, which, thrown wide open, allowed a full view of the garden to be seen, making it appear, in fact, like a portion of the dining-room, was eminently favorable to gayety. The smallest number of domestics was the order given for such dinners as these, to which the youth and gayety of both hosts and guests imparted so agreeable a quality.

"It is like the old times, before you were married," said Monsieur de Dreux to Madeline. "Do you remember those delightful little breakfasts when you were our guest?"

"I hope," added Blanche, "that we shall have them

again this winter ; with the addition of your husband they will be still more agreeable."

"My husband does not seem especially lively," answered Madeline, while her husband bowed his smiling thanks, "but he enjoys a great deal, I assure you, and a great deal that he keeps to himself."

Mullan came in for coffee, as was his daily habit. The young fellows went out in the garden to smoke, while Blanche and her friend retired to the green salon, which was peculiarly delightful at this sunset hour, for its windows commanded the western sky. The hour and the season were calculated for mutual confidences.

"I do not ask if you are happy," said Blanche, at once breaking the ice ; "that I can read at a glance. I do not ask either if your husband has every good quality ; that I take for granted. But talk to me about him. Do you remember how you laughed at my enthusiasm before my marriage ? I hope now to treat you in the same heartless manner."

"Do so," answered her friend. "I have not the smallest objection. I assure you that there is nothing in the world I enjoy so much as talking of my husband."

"The only thing that surprises me," said Blanche, "is that you had the courage to marry so grave and earnest a man as Monsieur Lecomte. This winter, when the marriage was announced, I doubted if it would ever take place, for I thought you would be afraid at the last moment?"

“Afraid of what?”

“I hardly know; afraid of marrying this taciturn gentleman. It seems to me that he might frown in a terrible way when one uttered a foolish thing. He is so amazingly clever!”

“Ah!” said Madeline, laughing, “You have little conception of the quantity of foolish things I said to him before he asked me to marry him. I think it was that which encouraged him.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean just that. You think him taciturn; you are mistaken, he is timid. You cannot imagine the good it did him when he saw that I had confidence enough in him to tell him all that passed through my head.”

Blanche smiled.

“I can readily understand that,” she said, “but I still must say that I do not understand how it happened that you were not afraid of him.”

Madeline’s eyes revealed the truth without the words which she slowly uttered.

“Do you think it nothing,” she said, softly, “to feel that you alone can read the thoughts of this silent man? You can not imagine how I felt when I learned that he had asked my hand of my parents. Just imagine! Science and I, fill his soul. Yes, dear friend, Science and Progress lead the way, and I follow after—and I am satisfied. His heart is a hidden treasure, of which I alone hold the key. I am proud of my husband, and I love him. I can not tell at times whether I am proud

of him because I love him, or if I love him because I am proud of him. But, after all, that matters little, I adore him!"

Blanche felt her heart contract with an acute pang. Before she had time to analyze it, Madeline went on with what she was saying.

"You can readily imagine, dear, the feeling with which I see my husband's name quoted among those of our rising young savants. When I married him, I had not the smallest idea of the number of celebrated people with whom he is in constant communication. At our marriage these celebrities were present in shoals. Members of the Institute, professors, and all sorts of clever people. I was dumbfounded, but I said to myself 'they are his father's old friends, who wish to be polite to him.' You know when people are married they invite everybody they ever knew or their families ever knew; old connections are exhumed for the occasion, and speedily forgotten. I don't know why this is done, I am sure, for I think one's wedding would be infinitely more agreeable with one's parents and two or three friends. But I was still more astonished when these gentlemen called on my husband and gladly accepted our invitations to dinner! The comfort of these people is, you know, that they are in town when everybody else, I mean by everybody of course fashionable society—is away.

"We had two or three dinners, and I confess that I still feel elated when I think of the manner in which these elderly and distinguished men treated my hus-

band. There was one even who called him 'our young teacher!' I ran out of the room, and when I was alone, my dear, I fairly cried with joy! I was simply idiotic, and hardly knew what I was doing, and when this old gentleman—who was frightfully ugly, let me here say—went away, I asked him to kiss me, and everybody laughed."

Madeline laughed, too, but tears stood in her eyes at the recollection of this scene.

Blanche leaned toward her friend, and kissed her tenderly. The two women sat for a moment with their arms around each other, as in the days of yore, when they studied out of the same book; then Madame de Dreux settled herself again in her corner of the sofa, with a dim consciousness that she was unhappy.

"But my husband was gratified," continued Madeline. "When we were alone he thanked me for my kindness toward his old professor. It seems that in the college where Gerard was educated all the professors are savants. This struck me as very odd, for I do not think our teachers were especially distinguished. But the education of young men and young women is a very different matter."

Blanche smiled, and Madeline talked on:

"You laugh at me," she said, "because you yourself are learned. I hear you still keep up all your studies, and I know you had all sorts of masters after we left school—while I am a perfect little dunce. I told Gerard that I did not kiss his professor because I

appreciated his wisdom, but simply because he had spoken of my husband as 'our young teacher.' Then Gerard became very grave."

Madeline did the same, as she sat silently recalling those delicious moments of mutual confidence between her husband and herself.

It was now quite dark, and the room was filled with the delicious odor of heliotrope from the flower beds in the garden.

Blanche, too, was absorbed in thought, but what were these thoughts? She could not have told. Guy's voice under the window suddenly reached her ear. She started, her brow contracted as with pain, and rising she rang for lights. When these were brought the salon was quite another place. Madeline, a little ashamed of having spoken so frankly, went to the mirror, and as she lightly smoothed her hair, she said gaily to her friend:

"And you—tell me something of yourself."

"I have nothing to tell you, except what you already know," answered Madame de Dreux. "You have married since we met. And I have a son. A child brings many changes in one's life"

"But such happy changes!"

"Yes," answered Blanche, with the slightest possible hesitation. "I adore my son, and I hope that he, some day, will return my affection with interest."

"As he will do, most certainly," said Madeline. "Whom does he resemble?"

"I think he is like my husband—but others say he

resembles me, which I most sincerely hope is not the case!"

"Would you regard that as such a misfortune?" asked Madame Lecomte, laughing.

Blanche smiled faintly, but her gravity instantly returned. Her friend resumed with more circumspection than she usually employed in speaking.

"Tell me, what does your husband intend to do?"

Madame de Dreux answered with an affectation of carelessness:

"Nothing more, I fancy, than he is doing now," she answered. "Had you come yesterday, you would have seen him in all his glory."

"How do you mean?"

"He is president of the Horticultural Society. He is also president of several other local societies. These are not very great honors, but they are certainly flattering."

"And he has no other ambitions?"

"I do not know," answered Blanche.

Madeline looked at her friend earnestly for a moment, then dropping her eyes, she turned away.

"What is it you wish to say?" asked Blanche.

"Only,"—Madeline hesitated, then summoning all her courage, she continued: "Only that it seems to me, with his fortune and position, Monsieur de Dreux ought to be something."

"Such as what?"

"Some thing! These two words signify anything, from a district attorney to a cabinet minister. You

see there are many degrees between these two grades. You really ought, Blanche, to try and excite your husband's ambition."

"Guy has no ambition.

"I am sorry to hear it. In these days everybody should be ambitious, in the best sense of the word I mean, of course. It does not seem to me precisely just that a rich man, who must have great influence, should live without trying to make a good use of his wealth, his intelligence, his influence, and of all that which is his; without, in short, contributing all in his power to the welfare of his country."

"That is precisely what he said in his speech yesterday, at the floral exhibition," answered Blanche, with an air of triumph.

"Really? Did he speak in that way?" asked Madeline. "Ah! How happy you make me, dear friend?"

And she embraced Blanche with some effusion.

"I am delighted to have given you so much pleasure," said Madame de Dreux, in a calmer tone, "but I must confess that I do not see—"

"Well! I will tell you, as your husband has proved the falsity of the accusation. He has been somewhat blamed for not utilizing the position given him by your large fortune. You know well how I love you, do you not? More than once my indignation has been aroused by hearing him attacked. I have defended him, of course, but, after all, what could I say? Very little."

"He is accused, you say?" asked Blanche, nervously. "Of what, pray?"

"I ought not to have used the word accusation—it is simply that they say he should have done very differently. But this does not matter, as he does really wish to enter into an active life."

"Excuse me!" said Blanche, "it does matter. I wish to know precisely what has been said in regard to my husband. To what cause is the lack of ambition, which they deplore, attributed?"

Madeline hesitated.

"To—to—I cannot tell you that, Blanche. And yet, perhaps, it is better that you should know, since you can then defend him. It is said, then, that after Monsieur de Dreux married, two years since, a woman of intelligence, who put him in possession of a large fortune, he was content to live an idle, agreeable life, and cared little to make himself useful to his country. Better things were expected of him—it was supposed that in exchange for your dowry, he would bestow on you that consideration and position which may be attained by personal merit."

"It was my guardian who said that!" cried Blanche, indignantly. "I recognize his phrases!"

"He said the same thing, at all events, but he is not the only one to say it. All your old friends, those who knew you in your childhood, and those who love you to-day, are inclined to regret—"

"I understand," interrupted Blanche, as she paced the salon. "My husband is accused of having taken my dowry, and of giving nothing in return. It seems to me that others might have done the same without incurring blame."

"Yes," answered Madame Lecomte, gently, "but your father and grandfather have both had much influence in public affairs; it was hoped that your husband would have the same, and people in their disappointment have been unjust toward him; and then, you know, that Monsieur de Dreux must suffer from the jealous and envious—"

"I know," interrupted Blanche, bitterly. "I have heard this same thing said too often. He is far too handsome! But when you see those persons again who so kindly concern themselves in the affairs of my husband and myself, will you kindly say to them that they are in too great haste to judge a man without waiting to hear him, and that it is a singular way to show affection toward a woman by pulling her husband to pieces, and that they will not succeed in detaching me from him in that way."

"Detaching you from him!" repeated Madeline, in great surprise. "Dear Blanche, you have misunderstood me, or I have expressed myself very badly. Your friends, on the contrary, wish you to use your influence over your husband; to communicate to him a taste for serious occupation, whether political or otherwise. They care little whether he becomes an ambassador or a member of the academy."

The idea of seeing her husband in the academy appeared so singular to Madame de Dreux, that she laughed heartily, but in a way that was too nervous to be altogether natural.

"Ever since you married a savant, you think only

of the academy, my dear Madeline," she said, when her hilarity was over. "Do not be troubled in regard to our future. I am infinitely obliged to you for speaking to me with such frankness. I ought to have distrusted the judgment of my friends and my near neighbors; and this is an excellent reason."

"Blanche! you do not mean that you think I have been actuated by unworthy sentiments?" cried Madeline, in consternation.

In her eyes and earnest gestures there was so much loyalty, that Madame de Dreux was greatly touched.

"No, dear Madeline, I think nothing of the kind. I can believe no evil of you. I simply mean that all superiority awakens malice and envy among many persons, and my husband is too superior for any one to show him any mercy."

The kind hearted little Madame Lecomte opened her eyes very wide, when she heard this allusion to Guy's superiority. Guy! whom she had always regarded as a good-natured fellow, with no especial ability. But she was a simple-hearted creature, who believed always precisely what was said to her.

When she was alone with her husband, she repeated her conversation with Blanche, and ended by mentioning the superiority attributed to Monsieur de Dreux by his wife.

"Of what nature is this superiority?" she asked, a little troubled that she had never even suspected it.

"I have not the smallest idea, my dearest," answered Gerard, "but if it exists, it ought to be very remarkable, for him to conceal it with such care."

CHAPTER V.

AWAKENING.

BLANCHE was alone in her large sleeping room—a room furnished with every luxury that modern taste and ingenuity could devise. She had dismissed her maid, extinguished her lights, and thrown her windows wide open. Then, drawing up a low couch, on which it was quite possible for two to find room, she seated herself where she could look into the garden, now sleeping in odorous silence in the moonlight.

The heart of the young wife and mother was very full of sad thoughts, as well as some disagreeable ones. Every one knows how such thoughts are often more difficult to bear than real sorrows. One makes it a duty to submit to these last with dignity, but what can one do against a persistent idea—a memory that haunts and harasses you. The conversation between Blanche and herself had left in her ears some of those discordant notes which she did not choose to hear, and which persisted in repeating themselves over and over again.

Recognizing the utter uselessness of her efforts to drive away this impression by the aid of others more agreeable, Madame de Dreux permitted herself to drift away on a current of ideas which was deep

enough to drown all the others, and yet were so familiar to her that she floated away without feeling any shock.

It was in this same room that two years before, her wedding journey had come to an end. It was here that her husband had knelt at her feet—the husband whom she had married against the wishes of all her friends; the husband whom she had endowed with all those blessings which wealth can procure, and to whom, as a last offering, she surrendered herself with all her girlish grace and beauty—which beauty was to develop into the radiant serenity of the beloved wife.

This room was now as fresh as then—the garden, the night, might have been the same—the whole scene recalled the same thoughts. As Blanche looked out on the moonlight, hot tears fell on her slender hands, wrung from her heart by the intensity of her anguish. It was six months since she had seen her husband alone; six months since he crossed that threshold.

Every morning when they met at the breakfast table, he lifted her hand to his lips, and then bent and kissed her forehead. He was more than polite to her always; he seemed anxious to please her in all particulars. But the intimacy of constant companionship had altogether ceased, her dream had vanished like a cloud from the sky, like the perfume from a rose.

Her tears now fell, less at the thought of his abandonment, than for the dread she felt that the hour must eventually come when her heart would unequivocally condemn her husband.

"Why has he become so indifferent to me?" she said to herself sometimes. "Does he think that he has paid a high-price for my tenderness by giving me a year and a half of love? I have given him my whole life—has he only lent me his?"

These reflections had not suddenly occurred to Blanche. They had slowly made their way into her soul; at first they occasioned vague disquietude, then terror, and then a dismal certainty that she was no longer loved. Under such circumstances what can a woman say to her husband? Blanche felt that it was impossible for her to question Guy in regard to his conduct.

The birth of her child had engrossed her for some time, but when weeks and months elapsed and Guy showed her only the same ceremonious and courteous attention, sharp pangs assailed her. She was not jealous; she was too ignorant and too innocent to fear rivals, but she was painfully humiliated. "I have ceased to please him," she said, "and my happiness has come to an end for ever!"

Blanche was too proud to speak to any one of her sorrows. A mother would have suspected them, but Blanche had no mother. She therefore kept her anxieties imprisoned in her own breast, all the time turning them over, sometimes with a sudden return of hope, oftener, however, with the blind persistence of despair.

Madeline's confidences, the knowledge that between her friend and the man whom this friend had married,

there was entire sympathy of tastes, imparted more than usual bitterness to the thoughts of Madame de Dreux this night of which we write. In the first months of her marriage she had gone to Guy with every thought and feeling, with the timid confidence of young wives who are afraid of displeasing; he had received her girlish confidences with the most charming grace, smiling kindly when they seemed to him especially childish—but of these long conversations in which each was to learn much of the other, where passion rises to supreme tenderness—of this Blanche knew nothing. Her conversations with her husband during their honeymoon were generally about their friends, their social circle, some journey they were to take, or other matters entirely impersonal. Blanche asked herself now why she had never noticed this at the time. How had she been able to accept for so long such alloy for pure gold. Her happiness as compared to Madeline, was the merest chimera.

What would she not have given could her life with Guy have been like that of her friend with Gerard! Stifling a sob, she turned for consolation to the thought of her son. Her child would love her. She would be a good mother to him, and he would be to her a compensation for all she had hoped to obtain, and had failed to find.

But her child as yet was only beginning to smile. How long she would be compelled to wait until he could realize that his mother had need of his affection and deserved his gratitude. Besides, other women,

happy creatures, had the love of both husband and child. What was Blanche doing all these long days, when he left her alone, to either receive or pay visits, about which he never cared to inquire? It was impossible that his horses should occupy him all day. He went to Paris very often, "on business," he said, but what was his business?

Blanche rose, and opening her desk took out the rough copy of the speech her husband had made at the opening of the Exposition. Entering by chance the smoking-room, where Guy had been writing, she found this paper half torn and crushed. She bore it away as a precious relic, for all that this man had touched, ungrateful as he was, was precious in her eyes. She had read over this MS., and when she heard her husband recite it the previous day, had wondered at his taking so much trouble for so trifling a matter. The speech had not struck her as being especially good, but after her conversation with Madeline she was curious to read it again, which she did very slowly, detecting under the erasures the hesitation in the thoughts. There is nothing more treacherous than a rough draught: there is no more dangerous arms against oneself, as everybody should remember. It is in these papers that frankness and cunning are most easily detected—a quick decision or uncertainty and hesitation. It is in the erasures, in the words omitted and supplied, that your enemy reads the fluctuations of your will and learns your weak side on which he determines to attack you.

Enlightened by the conversation with Madeline, Blanche read in this paper many things of which she had a vague intuitive perception, but which she had never put into words. The phrases were short and without connection; commonplace sentences occurred again and again, and were replaced by more elaborate ones. The written discourse was nothing—but spoken with proper emphasis, and in Guy's delicious voice, it had seemed really eloquent. Blanche read it for the second time with a feeling of consternation.

"He does not really understand the construction of the French language!" she said to herself. "What did he learn at college? He speaks with perfect correctness, or, at all events, he seems to do so. But he never speaks of serious matters," she added with a sigh.

Madame de Dreux restored the paper to her desk, and relapsed into meditation.

"Madeline was right," she said to herself. "Guy must be something. It is enough that he has ceased to love me, without everybody knowing it. What would be thought of him, were it known that I am nothing in his eyes, and that he lives an indolent, self-indulgent life surrounded by luxuries which he owes entirely to me? If he were occupied with politics, arts, or sciences, his neglect of me would be excused; he would have, at all events, the pretext of an absorbing occupation."

Her tears were over; she had fallen into a mood of bitter indifference. To save appearances in the eyes of

her family and friends was of the first importance to her. Her grief and mortification were her own, and she was not likely to reveal them. "Politics," she thought, "would open the best field to him; for that career no such excessive cleverness is essential!"

She had now arrived at a decision, and rising she went to a mirror and began to take down her hair. These blonde tresses, so shining and magnificent, Guy once liked to wrap around his arm, but they now seemed very heavy to her.

"What is the good of spending an hour every day in putting them up," she said, half aloud, "since he cares no longer for them? I will cut them off—I wonder what he will say?"

She looked around for the scissors that she might at once accomplish the sacrifice. She felt that Guy might be piqued by this mute reproach. Fortunately, the scissors were not to be found, and she was obliged to postpone the execution of her project. As she turned back to her dressing-table a step was heard in the next room, and then a light tap at the door.

"Who is it?" she cried, terrified, for she at once thought of her child, and was afraid he was ill.

"It is I, my dear," said Guy. "It is late, I know, but may I not come in?"

Without awaiting her reply, he opened the door, which was not bolted, and coming in, he closed it behind him.

Blanche stood in silence, looking at him. She was greatly disturbed, and unable to conceal her emotion.

"I see," said Monsieur de Dreux, with careless ease, "that my visit astonishes you. I am to blame, too, for this, of course, but I shall petition for absolution. You will not be more cruel than the church, will you?"

Speaking in this gay tone, he took his wife's hand and carried it to his lips. She snatched it away with considerable decision, as she looked him in the face, on which shone the lights in the candelabra.

Why was he here after his long neglect. Did he suppose that he had only to present himself before her, to obtain the love he had so long neglected.

A moment earlier, had Blanche been consulted, she would have felt that she would have given all she had in the world to have had him at her side. But now, this late visit irritated her. She was tempted to bid him leave her. A second thought filled her with joy. Had the day of explanation at last arrived?

She restrained herself, and said with such cold gravity: "Have you anything to say to me?" That Monsieur de Dreux felt like a man who has received a dash of cold water full in his face. But having been brought up in the best society, he faced the difficulty boldly.

"Anything to say to you, my dear Blanche?" he repeated. "Yes, a thousand things!"

He seated himself on the sofa, and tried to take her hand again, but the little hand struggled so wilfully that, not caring to be ridiculous, he dropped it.

"Could you not have told them to me to-morrow?" said his wife.

Even while she uttered these words she feared that he would take them literally; would she ever have another occasion like this to make him feel how he had wounded her.

"No," answered Guy, smiling. "I see, my dear, that I ought to apologize for my shortcomings, and I have other apologies to make. Will you listen to me for a moment? I will try to be brief."

"It is unnecessary for you to make any apologies," said Blanche, sinking into a low chair in front of him, "but if you have anything to say to me, pray be as brief as possible, as I am very tired."

"I obey," answered Guy, most amiably. "I have on my conscience a heavy sin, my dear Blanche. I have allowed myself to become absorbed in business matters which would be very uninteresting to you, did I undertake to enter into their details. You do not understand us men, of course, for in your simplicity you judge us by yourselves, and think it impossible for us to have two passions at the same time!"

Guy laughed as if he had said something especially clever, and this laugh showed his faultless teeth. Blanche looked him full in the face, and listened for further revelations with a very serious expression.

"My passion," he said, "is hardly of a nature to be confided to you, but— Ah! Blanche, will you ever forgive me?"

He looked at her with a world of entreaty in his wonderful eyes—the black velvet of his vest brought out the rich tone of his complexion, the softness of his silky moustache.

Blanche turned her eyes away; he continued:

"It was about the time of Bebé's birth. At any other time I should certainly have made a clean breast of it, but I feared any anxiety or shock might do you harm. Since then I absolutely have not dared to enter your presence, but at last, having been able to repair the evil I have done, I come to make my confession and implore your pardon."

"But what is the matter?" asked Blanche, still incredulous, and greatly agitated.

"Come here, my beloved; sit close by my side that I may whisper it in your ear. Nearer, nearer."

He drew her toward him, she yielded, and took her seat on the small couch by his side. He might say anything now—his cause was won in advance!

"I have been speculating," he said, "and I lost, but within two days I regained it."

"What!" cried Blanche, indignantly, "do you mean that for a miserable question of money, you would—"

"The sum was a large one," he replied, with some confusion. "I lost a hundred thousand francs."

The truth flashed before his wife's eyes. "It is false," she said to herself. This thought was instantly followed by another.

"If I do not believe him to-night, when should I ever believe him again. If he has lied now, my happiness is lost; my life is ended."

"A hundred thousand francs," she repeated aloud. "And is it for that paltry sum, Guy, that you have

made me so unhappy? I did not merit this at your hands!"

He dropped on one knee, and protested such deep penitence, that she was really touched. He did really repent, for he still loved her, but he fully intended deceiving her again. She was ready to put both arms around the neck of this handsome husband of hers, but she did not lose her dignity.

"It was a most unwise thing to do," she said, gravely, while her face was fairly radiant. "Just at the time, too, when your son was born, and when his future ought to be of the first consequence to you. You have set him a very bad example!"

"This child, who, I believe, is just three months old, is too young, I fancy, to appreciate my confidences, were I to make them to him, and I doubt if they would prevent similar errors in him either," answered the young father, with a smile, "but I have done with this sort of thing, I assure you. I have been in such a state of anxiety that I could not speak to you with frankness. I hoped every moment to repair my losses, and for a time I only succeeded in increasing them. I assure you I was afraid of you. Yes, Blanche, afraid of you. I said to myself, that were I alone with you I certainly could not keep silent, and it would be a terrible humiliation to admit that I had been guilty of such imprudence. Tell me, do you forgive me?"

Blanche threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Ah!" she whispered, "I have suffered so horribly! I thought you had ceased to love me!"

"What folly," answered Guy, with a kiss. "How could I cease to love you?"

Blanche pushed aside her hair—which had had so narrow an escape a few minutes before,—and Guy mechanically began to wind it around his wrist, as he had been in the habit of doing.

"Listen to me one moment," she said. "Let me give you a bit of advice, and exact a promise from you. The trial through which you have come is not of the kind which purifies—quite the contrary. I do not wish to reproach you, but it seems to me that if you had some serious occupation you would not waste time and money in this way. I beg of you, Guy, out of love for me, make up your mind, from this day, to be something or some one."

"I ask nothing better," answered Monsieur de Dreux, evasively; "we will see what can be done."

"No, no, that means bye-and-bye—I mean at once. Do you wish to enter diplomacy? Or do you prefer politics? Will you be an Ambassador or Deputy? Take your choice?"

"Heavens! how you do gallop on," cried Guy, with a hearty laugh. "As to becoming an ambassador, I reject the offer at once; I should much prefer to remain at home than to expatriate myself. But do you imagine that one becomes a Deputy in that summary fashion?"

"No my friend, such a step is taken by degrees."

"But, my dear, who would write my speeches? I am not eloquent by nature, I can't do it."

Blanche thought of the paper in her desk, and felt that her husband was right.

"You speak well," she said, in some confusion, burying her face on Guy's shoulder, "and I should be glad to give you any assistance in my power, if you would permit me. At school I was thought very clever in such things, and my memory in regard to history is quite wonderful. You have memory too, and between us we shall manage it. What do you say?"

"With all my heart!" answered Guy, as he put his arms around her.

Blanche gave up all idea of cutting her hair.

The next morning at breakfast Guy was very silent, and as he poured out a glass of Clos Vongeoit he said to himself: "Yesterday I got through all right; but heaven only knows what I can say to her the next time."

CHAPTER VI.

FIVE YEARS LATER.

“WHO is that passing at the foot of the avenue?” asked Madame Praxis, laying down her eye-glass in despair.

Blanche de Dreux leaned a little forward in order to see. A faint color rose to her cheeks and she sank back with an air of indifference, and looking off toward the sea glittering in the sunlight,

“It is Monsieur de Fresnes,” she answered.

“I wonder if he will be here to-day! It is a week since I saw him. He neglects me sadly,” said the old Countess, fanning herself. “A Minister away on a holiday, ought not to be very much occupied.”

“That depends,” said Blanche, her eyes still fixed on the sea.

The Countess Praxis took up her eye-glass and turned over a newspaper with an air of annoyance. Ever since Monsieur de Dreux had been interested in politics, his wife had become absolutely insupportable. Before that, one had been able to converse with her; and she was as willing to chat about people as things. Now it was totally different; proper names closed her lips hermetically; no more interesting gossip, no more pleasant wondering, no more social problems to be discussed. But really, this was dullness itself! Had she

supposed for a moment that dear Blanche, in one of the loveliest spots on the whole coast of Brittany, would have remained as silent as in Paris, the good Comtesse would certainly have taken care not to accompany her into the country. Then, too, De Dreux himself, ever since he had been made a Deputy, never opened his lips except in public.

"Are you amused here?" asked the Comtesse, turning hastily to her young friend.

"Amused? Not the least in the world!" answered Blanche, in her calm tone.

"Ah!" said Madame Praxis, considerably disconcerted.

"A woman who is the wife of a Deputy is never amused," said Blanche, with a faint inflection of irony in her voice. "What would our electors say if that were the case! We must be serious, dear Comtesse, very serious, for you know many a man's official career has been marred by his wife's frivolity."

"Many more men have been ruined by their own!" grumbled the Comtesse, half to herself. "Look! there comes Mullan—Mullan, come here, that I may pull your ears!"

Mullan bowed from a distance, and in order to show his submission, came toward the old lady at full speed.

The five years which had elapsed since the Horticultural Exposition had left no visible traces upon him. At thirty, he looked several years older than he really was, but at forty-five he was extremely young looking. He approached the two ladies, and seated himself on

a low tabouret in such a way that his knees nearly touched his chin.

"Tell me, you wretch, if you are making love to that pretty little innocent, Madame Lecomte? Is it you who are trying to destroy the—what word shall I use? it is not happiness, it is much more complicated. Ah! I have it, equilibrium is the word—well, then, the conjugal equilibrium of this charming ménage composed of a savant and an artless little girl. Were I you, I should be ashamed to attempt anything so cruel and so immoral!"

"Excuse me, dear lady, not criminal, not immoral. Condescend to follow my feeble reasoning for a moment. Madame Lecomte adores her husband, who unquestionably deserves all the love she lavishes upon him; but the world is full of perverse creatures who are quite willing to commit the baseness which you have just attributed to me. Now these perverse beings would not hesitate to approach even the adored wife of an illustrious savant, and would do their best to fill her ears with their poisonous flattery. I act as a lightning rod to this excellent Lecomte, or better still, I am his watchdog; I watch over his wife and try to amuse her, that she may not be tempted to seek amusement elsewhere."

Madame Praxis gave him a smart blow with her fan. Blanche smiled faintly, although she had heard hardly a word of what had been said.

"You see," continued Mullan, "that I am really the most unselfish of men. There is nothing I would not do to show my devotion. Is not this so, Madame?"

Blanche did not hear, and the Countess recalled her wandering attention.

"Child! what are you thinking about? I never saw you so distraite!"

"I beg your pardon!" said Blanche, turning toward her, "I am distraite, but I intend to turn over a new leaf and be more sociable. You know of old that I am subject to attacks of this kind."

"Yes, some time after your marriage. I remember them perfectly, but I have seen nothing of the kind in you for some time; that was the time that Mullan was so devoted to you."

"Heavens!" exclaimed that gentleman, raising his hands despairingly. "How can you say such a thing?"

"Were you not devoted to her?" said Madame Praxis, quickly.

"Of course I was. I was always devoted to Madame de Dreux, and I am so, still, and shall be forever! Do you wish my attentions to cease?"

"Yes, if you have transferred your homage to Madame Lecomte."

"One does not bar the other," answered Mullan, with great gravity.

Presently the three friends began to laugh. They were old friends—bound together by one of those aggressive friendships which last all through life, brief tempests only seeming to cement them more closely.

"Those were charming days," said Mullan, with an exaggerated sigh, "when my friend De Dreux was

merely the President of an Horticultural Society; when his discourse fell only on simple provincial cases. At present it is his country which he addresses; it is to his Electors that he teaches social truths."

"Then you do not consider the ears of his Electors simple? Heavens and earth! What are they then?"

"Ah! dear Comtesse, the orations made to a man's Electors are not intended for them. They pass over their heads, more or less covered with their cotton night-caps, and go by a path which up to this moment has escaped the most serious search made by savants and philosophers, into the Chamber of Deputies, where you will notice there is no one to gather them up. They are gathered up, however, and the result is that the Deputy becomes a great man, an eminent man. It is very singular, is it not dear Madame? It is an acoustic process, which would make the fortune of an inventor if it could be applied under all circumstances. If our friend Lecomte would only try it!"

Blanche frowned. Mullan, with the most innocent air, turned toward her and continued:

"These dear Electors! Just think of the trouble one takes to please them! You yourself, Madame, have left your pretty Château de Rémeçy to bury yourself here—bury is not the word, since we are high enough to overlook the whole country, really as well as figuratively,—but it is a sacrifice, nevertheless, and a sacrifice made to the Electors, for otherwise de Dreux could not be sure of being renominated. What do you think about it?"

"I really do not know," answered Blanche, wearily. "I understand nothing of politics."

Mullan glanced at Madame Praxis. There was a world of malicious meaning in his eyes. Blanche did not notice it. The children were approaching with their English nurse. Edmond, very tall of his age, led by the hand his two-year-old sister, and the mother's eyes turned from one to the other with that contented look, which is the highest expression of happiness. She was a happy mother. This any one could see at a glance.

The children were soon sent back to their play, and Madame de Dreux rose to return to the house, for the dinner hour was near at hand; but before she left the terrace she stood looking off once more at the ocean, which had for her an intense fascination.

Monsieur de Fresnes passed at this moment, and raised his hat to her with marked respect.

She returned his salutation, and slowly turned away.

"What a singular woman she is!" said the Comtesse Praxis, who followed her more slowly, leaning on the protecting arm of Monsieur Mullan. "Do you remember how brilliant she, as a young girl, promised to be? What immense vitality she had, and what spirits. All that seems to have vanished; she has faded like an old pastel!"

"There is a fire sleeping under the cinders, though," answered Mullan. "What would you have, Comtesse? It is not her fault: she loves her husband!"

CHAPTER VII.

EXPLANATIONS AND PARDON.

A GAY cavalcade entered the court-yard of the château as the clock struck six. This cavalcade consisted of Monsieur and Madame Lecomte, Madame Rovey, a plump and pretty widow of thirty; her sister Amy, who was generally called Amy Robsart, in remembrance of Walter Scott; two young neighbors, who were nice fellows and good riders, and finally Guy himself.

Guy de Dreux was handsomer than ever, and far more dignified, for he was heavily borne down with his new responsibilities, and showed only too plainly that such was the case. He was born to be happy, to live a careless, idle life—to raise stock or plant cabages, according to the height of the step of the ladder on which fortune might have seen fit to place him—and nothing in the world was, or could be more distasteful to him than to occupy himself with the affairs of the nation.

“The Deputy in spite of himself,” as Mullan called him, much to the disgust of Blanche, but greatly to Guy’s amusement.

To Guy’s amusement at first, but after a couple of years had elapsed, a reserved smile had taken the place of the hearty laugh, with which he had greeted his

friend's witticism. Mulan was not pleased at this innovation.

"You have good teeth, show them!" said that gentleman, who had a good deal of the Don Quixote about him.

He was a Don Quixote and half a Sancho Panza, not so unusual a combination as may be supposed. His first impulse was always chivalric, his second reflective, or rather prosaic, but having neither wife nor children, nor any near relatives to interfere in his affairs, and disturb him with their advice, he trusted to his sense of honor in all matters of conscience. He was on the steps when the riding party entered the court-yard, and at once hurried to take the bridle of the horse ridden by Madame Lecomte, who gave him a gentle smile of thanks as she dismounted.

Guy occupied himself with Madame Roverly, as was his habit that year. The two young neighbors disputed for Miss Amy's favor, who sat on her pretty chestnut mare watching them, with a provoking little smile.

But as a woman can't always remain on a chestnut mare, Miss Amy finally accepted the assistance of the younger of the two men, while the richer of the two disengaged her long skirt. She gave them each something to do, therefore both should have been satisfied. They all moved toward their rooms, laughing and talking as they went. Guy, himself, had forgotten a speech he was preparing, and talked with Madame Roverly with an air of careless ease which had become of late somewhat unusual with him.

In the hall they met Blanche, who had just come in; she was leading a child by each hand, and was taking them to the nursery for their supper, which ceremony always took place under her own eyes.

This apparition cast a certain chill over this gay band. The two young men went to the salon, and the ladies hastened to make their toilettes for dinner.

It was never especially gay at the Château de Mesnil, and a disinterested observer would have asked himself what could bring and retain there so brilliant a circle.

"We must spend the summer somewhere," said Blanche to her husband. "Your Electors will be charmed to see you at Mesnil."

"Then let us take as many people with us as possible," Guy answered, for he had no real love for the country, and found it unendurable without a dozen or more guests.

"Make your own invitations," said Blanche. "I shall take the Comtesse Praxis; she will make an excellent chaperon."

"A chaperon for you! After seven years of marriage!" was on the lips of de Dreux. But with a prudence that was most unusual with him, but which coincided with his new rôle of politician, he abstained, and he had done wisely. The Comtesse Praxis was indeed a good chaperon, if not for Blanche, who required no such protection, at least for the persons whom Guy's invitations brought to the château, and to keep up its air of fashion and decorum.

Mullan must go, of course. They could not live without Mullan in a place like this on the sea-shore of Brittany; then the Lecomtes, Blanche must write them herself. Madeline was pretty and Gerard had become quite celebrated in the last few years, and made a very agreeable companion; and in the gaming season was especially desirable, as he was a wonderful shot.

"There are two or three men in the vicinity," Guy said. He remembered having seen some two years before—two collegians, who by this time must have developed into men who could be made useful.

Monsieur de Fresnes, too, had recently purchased an estate not very far away.

"I am sure I can't imagine why," said Guy, "as he is a Minister. He will not be obliged to remain in the country to flatter his constituents. I should like to have bought property near Chantilly or Rambouillet, myself. Anywhere, indeed, that was habitable. But after all, every one to his taste!"

Thus, so far as men were concerned, Le Mesnil was amply provided. It was the women who were lacking. The Comtesse Praxis did not count; Madeline, absorbed in her husband, was equally unavailable. Blanche—but Blanche was his wife. These women could not make a very brilliant circle.

Guy came in one day from the Chamber; it was the last week of the session. He was in the best of spirits.

"Just think of it," he said to his wife, "in the Tribune, during a most dreary speech in relation to the law on cereals—"

"Did you speak?" interrupted Madame de Dreux.

"I?" said the Deputy, in great surprise, "no, indeed, why should I? I never should have thought of it."

With a sigh of relief, Blanche made a sign for him to continue.

"Well! as I was saying, during this interminable discourse, I looked up and down the Tribune for amusement, and whom did I see but Madame Rovey; she wore a rose-colored hat, and her sister a white one. They were as pretty as pinks, I assure you. She has given up her mourning, you know?"

"I supposed so, as you spoke of a rose-colored hat."

"Yes, to be sure, I beg your pardon. When I came out I met them; it was odd, was it not? They asked where we intended to spend the summer. I asked them the same question; they had not decided. They said they adored the sea, and then—"

"You invited them?"

"Yes; do you object?"

"Not altogether. But you see I did well in saying that I would take the Comtesse Praxis as chaperon. I could not manage those two ladies alone."

Guy was somewhat embarrassed. He had felt when the invitation was given that his wife would be displeased, but he relied on her sweetness of temper and her politeness not to manifest this displeasure. He began a stammering apology, which Blanche interrupted with a smile.

"I knew that you would invite these or others of the same style," she said, "for you like the society of brilliant and somewhat coquettish women."

"You must forgive them for those deficiencies, and excuse the great contrast offered by their manners to yours, my dear," said De Dreux, gallantly. "You are far too perfect for this world—all women cannot be like you."

Blanche accepted this compliment with one of those enigmatical smiles which invariably made her husband uncomfortable. But he soon shook off this feeling, for he had got what he wanted.

Madame Rovey determined to make amends to herself for the six years of seclusion necessitated by her marriage to a splenetic Englishman, and was quite ready to accept the homage of such a charming young man as Guy. Her sister, Amy, who kept her in countenance, had no more illusions. They installed themselves in triumph at Mesnil without thinking or caring whether their coming displeased the mistress of the establishment or not. They were quite sure of being amused, for they carried about with them an atmosphere of dissipation which made them joy, and out of which they could not exist.

The dinner was very gay, as was usually the case. Blanche had at her right Gerard Lecomte, who talked of a thousand interesting things; Madeline, opposite, listened with ears and eyes to their discreet conversation, interrupted from time to time by noisy appeals from the other guests. Madeline was happy when she could not have her husband next herself, to know that he was near Madame de Dreux. About Blanche there was an atmosphere of serenity; she was never guilty

of the smallest coquetry; she was honest and true, while her melancholy was looked upon as reserve.

Just as the servants were about to retire, as usual, after placing dessert upon the table, Guy exclaimed, imprudently:

“Ah! my friends, this is our last night of folly!”

“Why is that?” asked Miss Amy, with a smile that displayed the loveliest teeth in the world. She was French, like her sister; but as the latter had married an Englishman, Amy felt it incumbent upon her to imitate English manners, and even to adopt a slight foreign accent.

“Is it not to-morrow that your guardian—or our guardian, I should say—is coming to pay us his annual visit?” asked Guy, addressing his wife.

She bowed an assent, but did not speak.

“And you must be very solemn, Miss Amy, and you, also, Madame,” Guy continued, speaking to Madeline, who, instead of replying, laughed in his face—that being one of her favorite arguments. “We must, all of us,” continued De Dreux, “be on our good behavior, otherwise we shall have bad marks, and we all of us know that would be a very sad thing.”

Madame Rovey laughed, and the two youthful neighbors did the same, as did Miss Amy. Madeline looked at Blanche, and laughed no more. She felt that her friend was displeased. A slight constraint followed this hilarity, and Blanche rose from the table.

The ladies all followed her to the salon, where

Miss Amy seated herself at the piano to play some dancing airs.

"No dancing after dinner!" said Madeline, with a little imperious air, "but you may have a cup of coffee, if you want it very much."

The coffee was served by Madame Rovey's pretty hands; that lady had found this an excellent way of approaching her fair hostess at least once each day. Madame de Dreux filled the cups, and the widow standing by her side took them away with gay little remarks; Miss Amy took the sugar bowl, and the two sisters made the tour of the room, after which their intercourse ended with Blanche until the next evening. Having accomplished this daily and self-appointed duty, which she regarded as sufficient compensation for all the hospitality shown her by Blanche, Madame Rovey went to the piano in her turn. She had a charming voice, which she used in singing light opera music—Opera Bouffe was not then invented—had it been, she would have sung nothing else. After an hour or more she left the piano, and sank back into a low basket-chair standing near the long window leading out upon the terrace. By this manœuvre she was a little away from the salon. The young men crowded about her, Guy among them, as it is hardly necessary to say.

"And now," said Gérard Lecomte, softly, "a little music, if you please!"

Blanche shook her head; she was too tired to play, she said. Madeline went to the piano, opened an old

book of sonatas, and began one of those exquisite works which never grow old, and which combine to those who know how to understand them, all that is most delightful in musical art.

"Ah! my dear child," said the Comtesse, who was insane on the subject of music, "you make me feel half a century younger."

Mullan stood leaning against the piano. He, too, loved such music, and appreciated it.

The friends listened for a long time to Madeline. She had found in her piano another way of conversing with her husband, while robbing him of none of his precious time. When she found that he loved music with a deep and passionate devotion, she had cultivated her talent, which she had hitherto regarded as a mere accomplishment, and became a scientific student. Gérard worked on without listening, but not without hearing, and many a time, when she interpreted a passage with her whole soul, he would lift his head and exchange one look with his wife. These looks were Madeline's greatest reward. They were worth to her more than the noisy applause of a salon full of people.

The young people had deserted the terrace. The night was perfect and the garden very lovely in the moonlight. Mullan, a little uneasy when he missed De Dreux, stole away during the music and went on an exploring expedition around the château. He came back with little satisfaction, but as he came up the steps he heard the gay laughter of the little party who had just returned from their saunter in the garden.

One glance showed him that Madame Roverly was among them, but Guy de Dreux was not. As Mullan crossed the hall on his way to the salon, a form rose from a sofa in the corner.

It was Guy, who rubbed his eyes with a despairing gesture.

"What! have you been asleep?" asked his friend, reproachfully.

"I have, indeed. Zounds! Is it my fault? That classical music always sends me to sleep. Little Roverly is sulking because I refused to gratify one of her caprices, and I went to sleep because I really had nothing else to do. But we shall soon be friends again."

Mullan was sorely tempted to say something extremely disagreeable, but Guy lounged toward the salon, and Blanche might have heard.

Blanche had heard; it was not her fault, but the hearing of some persons is so delicate that they catch the most distant sounds. Those who knew her well, who had studied her peculiarities and loved her, had noticed this quality. Her husband was entirely unaware of this, however, consequently she had more than once heard things not intended for her, but he regarded this as an accident and a coincidence.

He entered the salon a little dazzled by the light, coming, as he did, from the semi-darkness of the hall, where he had been asleep; Madeline left the piano, while Madame Praxis enthusiastically exclaimed that she had never heard anything finer. Blanche glanced

at her husband, and almost imperceptibly shrugged her shoulders.

“What would you have?” he answered. “You know that heavy music—”

“Yes, I know—you like only comic operas,” she replied, with the enigmatical smile that so puzzled and worried her husband. “A man,” she continued, “to whom the interests of his country are confided has a right to rest instead of listening to music which the rest of us call classic. I am afraid, however, that you will not sleep much to-night.”

As Blanche spoke she lifted her eyes; they fell on Madame Rovey, who stood in the doorway, her fair face slightly flushed, her eyes unnaturally bright, and her hair gracefully dishevelled. Blanche turned from this woman to her husband with some disdain. Guy started. Did she suspect?

But his wife's eyes resumed their habitual expression.

“Do not forget,” she said, “that Monsieur de Gros-mont will be here by nine o'clock in the morning. He likes to travel at night, and so avoid the dust.”

“Good Heavens!” cried Madame Praxis, “was there ever such a man!”

“But if you don't do that,” said Mullan, “you must sleep at an inn.”

“Which I will never do!” answered the Comtesse. “Sleep in a strange bed and a strange place, where one might be assassinated.”

“Then ask De Dreux to build you a railroad—that is the present craze.”

"The new road is to pass by here," said De Dreux, carelessly; "my predecessor obtained that concession."

"When will this road be built?" asked Miss Amy, in a sleepy tone.

"In two years, I fancy," answered Guy, stifling a yawn. "I beg ten thousand pardons, but I am utterly used up to-night."

Good nights were exchanged, and the procession of guests took their way, candles in hand, up the wide staircase. Good nights were repeated at the doors of the various rooms. Blanche stopped at hers.

"Do not forget," she said to her husband, as he kissed her hand, "that you have promised to visit the new school at Messul. You have an appointment with the mayor at one o'clock."

"True!" answered Guy, "I had forgotten all about it. You are wrong, Blanche, in praising my memory; it is merely parrot-like; you are my inspiration."

Madame de Dreux smiled, but the smile was a brief one. On the threshold of her door, at the other end of the corridor, she saw Madame Roveny talking with her sister; she seemed to find it impossible to leave her.

"I wonder what long story that good man, the mayor, will pour into my ear," said Guy, carelessly.

"Good night," answered Blanche, abruptly ending the conversation, which threatened to continue forever. She entered her room and closed her door.

It was long that night before she slept. Her mind was filled with harassing cares. She had gone at once to bed, however, hoping to find rest if not sleep.

As she began to feel a little drowsy, she suddenly heard a slight sound, like the creaking of a door. Always uneasy about her children, she listened breathlessly.

A soft step in the corridor, passing her door, she heard distinctly. No one else would have distinguished it among the vague echoes which compose the silence of the night, in a house occupied by many persons.

A door opening and closing softly again; then all was still, and she dropped her head upon her pillow.

"She, or another!" she said to herself, repeating almost the words she had used to her husband the day he had told her of his invitation to Madame Rovey to pass the summer at Mesnil. "What did it matter—"

She did not dare finish her thought. Five years before, when she vaguely suspected her husband's first infidelity, her heart was nearly broken, but afterwards she had gone through with so much of a similar character that now on each new occasion she was no longer overwhelmed.

Blanche was one of those natures which never surrender: some of these die in their harness, others struggle with destiny all through long lives, undismayed and unconquered.

After the temporary happiness which had accompanied her husband's entrance into the new career where she had thrust him, had come a most painful season—a very autumn of her married life. It was,

however, more like winter than autumn. After this Blanche did not brighten again; her illusions had all vanished.

When this state of mind arrived, Madame de Dreux was no longer the young and ignorant woman whom Guy had so readily deceived. She no longer believed. Very little clairvoyance was required to show her that Guy's indifference coincided with the introduction into their circle of a very charming woman, whose husband's business called him constantly away from home.

Blanche acquired condemnatory proof of her husband's intimacy with this lady. When one's suspicions are aroused, the petty accidents of life are never long in bringing you these proofs.

Too proud to complain, too profoundly wounded to longer love this man, who so perpetually deceived her, and for a woman who was considerably older and far less beautiful than herself, Blanche felt utterly discouraged. Her strength gave way under her depression of spirits, and she became so seriously ill that her life was despaired of. If she lived, it was because she had a son who needed her.

When she began to recover, and perceived her husband constantly at her side, and day after day beheld him ready to gratify her every caprice, she was still more discouraged.

"He loves me," she said to herself; "he loves me as much as he is capable of loving, and yet it does not prevent him from loving elsewhere! What a weak

nature! How inconstant and unprincipled! And I have loved him so faithfully that I have made a very God of him. Alas! there is little of a God about him, except in his exterior."

Guy knew very well what had occasioned the illness of his wife. He had always mentally accused her of being nervous and susceptible. A grave illness succeeding such a discovery as she had made, did not astonish him. As he was a kind-hearted fellow, and did really love his wife, he felt that an explanation was necessary.

Taking advantage of an evening when Blanche was feeling in better health and spirits, having driven out that day for the first time after her illness, he made an ample confession to her.

"I have sinned toward you," he said, in conclusion, "but Heaven is my witness that I know not why I have done so. I feel for you, my beloved wife, the most profound tenderness; if I lost you, I should be inconsolable, and yet I afflict you! Believe me, when I say that I have always supposed you to be in perfect ignorance of my shortcomings. And now, dear Blanche, unless you wish me to be absolutely miserable, you will forgive me."

He spoke with some warmth, and with evidently sincere affection. Yes, he regretted having offended this woman, who was so worthy of his love; he deplored his error with entire honesty. Blanche felt an emotion of profound pity.

"My poor husband," she said, placing her hands on

her husband's shoulders, "you love me as well as you can. I know that very well."

She looked into the eyes, which spoke so eloquently of repentance, and turned away her head that he might not see her tears.

"You will forgive me, then!" cried Guy, kissing her hand eagerly. "Ah! how good you are; you are as far above other women as the stars are above ourselves."

Blanche sighed deeply. It was very nice to be a star, but from the very superiority of their position the stars are loved very rarely, and at long intervals. Upon them is lavished, from time to time, enthusiastic admiration, but their companionship is not earnestly sought and desired.

For some few weeks Guy seemed almost an angel. His usual eloquence was doubled, thanks to the sincerity of his joy, and he was irresistible to all whom he met. He was made Deputy in the most unexpected manner, and almost unanimously.

"He speaks so well!" said one. "He is a natural orator. What an honor for us to be represented by a man of such talent as his!"

Blanche triumphed. Her joy was but brief. The enthusiasm, the love and eloquence of her husband, were all on the surface. She soon acquired the melancholy certainty that Guy was lacking in depth. He was a man of impulse, without judgment, and without reflection, in the same way that his dashing, brilliant language conveyed no meaning.

"I have made a frightful mistake," she thought. "Instead of marrying a superior man, I have married a most ordinary one. My error is irreparable, but were it possible to remedy it I would never admit strangers into the secret of my imprudence. I have chosen my lot; I have no one to blame but myself. It is not Guy's fault that he is not the ideal being of whom I dreamed. He is not unkind to me in any way, he loves me after his own fashion. I must be to him a devoted wife, instead of the proud, triumphant one, I had hoped. Ah! Pride, what an enemy you are to happiness!"

Pride is certainly an enemy to happiness, but sometimes it does us great services, and to Blanche it was a saviour. The now complimentary remarks she heard made upon her husband determined her to do her best to make the world consider him the superior person which he ought to have been.

After a time it was not enough for her to forgive his deception, so far as she herself was concerned; she wished him to be admired, envied and respected. The first article which attacked her husband in the morning journals brought tears of joy to her eyes.

"He has enemies," she said, "he must therefore be looked upon as a man of merit."

But Guy was not quite so manageable as he ought to have been to fill so difficult a rôle. Hearing, as he constantly did, that he had genius, he soon began to believe it, and the constant advice of Blanche, given as it was with the greatest prudence and sweetness,

appeared to him very needless and almost impertinent. He wished to fly with his own wings, and as they were neither those of an eagle nor a swan, he beat the air with them very ineffectually in his first attempt. Fortunately this especial blunder was not generally known, for it was a simple little speech made at a public dinner, in regard to which he had carefully avoided consulting his wife. In the days of which we write, which are even now afar off, reporters were unknown and orators were generally obliged to send an abridgement of their remarks to the journal of the vicinity. Mullan, who delighted in assisting at what he called "these little family fêtes," hastened to Blanche with the news of her husband's misadventure.

"I do not know where the trouble was," he said, as he finished his recital, "but all at once he began to contradict himself, and said precisely the contrary of what he had promised them at the time of the election. Of course it was a mistake on his part; fortunately, everybody but your husband and myself were intoxicated more or less. They applauded violently, which did not astonish me—for Guy speaks so well! But don't let him print his speech—look out for that."

The next day, when the editor of the local newspaper went to Monsieur de Dreux to ask him for the heads of his speech of the previous evening, he carried away with him a profession of faith corresponding with that issued by the Deputy at the time of his election. This time Blanche did not take as much trouble as usual to persuade her husband that it was from himself that his fine speeches emanated.

"Your memory is not as good as you fancy," she said, coldly, "or at all events, it is purely superficial. A Deputy ought never to say one word in public without referring to his previous speeches, in order to avoid not only repetitions, but also that which is a much graver matter—contradictions."

"Good Heavens!" cried de Dreux, greatly vexed. "Would you have me keep a ledger, and look over it every time I open my lips?"

"If you can't trust to yourself," said Blanche, "I will gladly write out a few notes for you; but you must feel that it were much better that you should do it yourself, for I know nothing of politics, and I find them, I fancy, even more tiresome than you do."

For the first time in his life Guy had a vague suspicion that his wife was ridiculing him. But as such an idea was eminently disagreeable to him, he dismissed it at once, and snatched at her proposition, so acceptable to an indolent man like himself.

"I should consider it the greatest possible favor," he answered, graciously, "if you would do as you propose."

"I will try," answered his wife, "but you must not be vexed if I give it up; it may be that such a task is beyond my abilities."

When this arrangement was concluded, peace reigned between the husband and wife. Guy had before this given up all his time to his political duties, and now that these were delegated to his wife, he permitted himself some relaxation, some little excursions out of the conjugal domains.

Blanche was well aware of this, but said nothing. As she could not make over her husband's character, what was the good of fretting him with reproaches? There was, besides, to her eyes, something exceedingly vulgar in reproaches and in the bickering to which they led.

She submitted to all his infidelities without a word, even when Guy in his penitence sought the relief of confession, for the singular part of his character was that he did repent.

Regret for his past fault was invariably a proof that his last caprice had begun to lose its charm. He redoubled his attentions to his wife, who accepted them in silence.

He would have infinitely preferred that she should make what is known as a scene; her magnanimity was very disagreeable to him and puzzled him greatly.

"You sometimes ought to reproach me," he said to her one day, just before they went to Mesnil.

"Your superiority oppresses me and your forgiveness is a heavy load to bear when you accord it in such a way. It is what the English call heaping coals of fire on the head of one's enemy. Do you look upon me as your enemy, my dear Blanche?"

"I? not the least in the world."

"By the way, have you seen Madame Rovey lately?"

Guy bit his lips, and his reply was not especially

amiable. Nevertheless, he invited Madame Rovey and her sister to Mesnil within two weeks.

The fact was, he was hourly occupied in paving with good intentions the path to hell. Fortunately for him his wife had not the smallest desire to hasten his progress there, and as he was young, she hoped that he would yet have time for repentance.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GUARDIAN.

MONSIEUR DE GROSMONT arrived at the hour named by Blanche. He was an extremely punctual traveller, who exacted equal punctuality from others. Miss Amy displeased him from the moment he looked at her, merely because she was late to breakfast. But as he was an extremely well-bred man, he allowed nothing of this to be seen; his former ward was the only one to suspect it. Madame de Grosmont had been dead for two years. Her husband had loved her just enough to live with her in entire harmony, but not enough to feel any poignant grief at her death. Besides, he was passionately fond of travelling, while Madame de Grosmont never wished to leave home.

He was sixty when he became a widower; he was in good health and good spirits, and to the great joy of his servants, spent most of his time in little excursions, while they lived in lazy luxury. One person, his valet, was by no means gratified, as he greatly preferred a sedentary life.

At dinner, the night following his arrival, it was Madame Rovey who was waited for. The two sisters were judged accordingly by this worthy man who knew the world.

He watched them attentively through the whole

repast, and afterward, when the more frivolous guests assembled a little apart to find some compensation for the constraint which so severe an observer imposed upon them, Monsieur de Grosmont turned to Blanche.

"My dear," he said, "where did you pick up these strange acquaintances?"

"They are my husband's," Blanche was about to say, in her eagerness to exculpate herself, but she checked herself.

"They are very agreeable women," she answered. "A little loud, perhaps, but English manners justify their *laissez aller*."

"They are English then?" said her guardian.

"No, they are French by birth, but they have lived much in England. British manners you know, dear guardian—"

"I have nothing to say!" he exclaimed, lifting his eyebrows with a contemptuous air. "I have no advice to give you of course, Blanche, but I must say that it seems to me in a house like this, which must of course be a very noticeable one, that you ought to avoid the society of flirtatious women like these, who as you must admit are by no means elegant or well bred. They have nothing in common with you, child—"

"Nor with my friend De Dreux," Mullan, who was pretending to read, took it upon himself to say.

Blanche accepted her guardian's sermon with every evidence of compunction.

"You are right," she said. "I ought to have thought of this. I assure you, in Paris no one

objected to them. It is simply that they allow themselves a little more liberty in the country. I will try another time to make a better selection of my guests."

"You had best take your husband's advice on such subjects, my dear, for I am quite sure that had he known of your intentions before you committed yourself, that he would never have permitted you to give the invitation."

Mullan looked up with such a droll expression that Blanche trembled; but Mullan was too well bred to interfere. He returned to his Review making a great rustle with his paper-knife, in order that they might not forget his presence.

"By the way, child," resumed Monsieur Grosmont, "I want to say a few words to you about your husband. You remember, of course—for I hardly dare hope that you have forgotten it—how opposed I was to your marriage with De Dreux."

Blanche looked at her guardian with a troubled smile.

He continued.

"I thought him frivolous, superficial; in short, I entirely misunderstood his character. For some years now, he has shown me how entirely I underrated his character, and he promises to become one of the important men of our times. Just as formerly I felt it my duty to express to you my doubts and my fears—even my dissatisfaction, I now feel it to be my duty, as well as my pleasure, to tell you of my new impressions—which this time are settled convictions."

Blanche had listened to this harangue with eyes cast down, and with considerable confusion of mind. It had been with the greatest difficulty that she had succeeded in obtaining the consent of Monsieur de Grosmont to her marriage. The arguments with which he then opposed her wishes, she to-day within herself accepted as truths. And yet she was proud of having her husband praised, for this new Guy she had made with her own hands. It was she who had breathed into him the breath of life—she alone knew the hollowness of this idol, and the vanity of all its glory. “Suppose I were to die before he does!” she said to herself, suddenly terrified by the thought that the scaffolding erected with such painstaking care might suddenly crumble into nothingness. “People would know then how they had been deceived and how I had passed my life in lying to the world. How shameful this would be! And our children, what would they think of their father? What would they think of their mother?”

“Are you not satisfied, Blanche?” asked Monsieur de Grosmont. “Do you want still more formal apologies?”

“Forgive me, my dear guardian,” answered Madame de Dreux, “I was so touched by your kind words, so gratified by the feelings which dictated them, that I could not at first reply. This is one of the most delightful moments of my life. I thank you with my whole heart.”

“Yes,” he said, laying his hand affectionately on

that of the young wife. "I know very well how much you love your husband, and I share your admiration for his talents as an orator. He will do wonders, this young man, he will do wonders; but I cannot impress too strongly upon your mind, child, the necessity of watching every act of your own, and of being most careful in the circle you gather about you. The higher your social condition the greater is the risk you run of animadversion. You cannot be too fastidious and cautious."

Gay laughter was heard from the piazza, and the Comtesse Praxis came in quite out of breath.

"They are mad," she said as she dropped into a chair, "mad, I assure you. They compelled me to run with them. Mullan! why were you not there to defend me?"

The young man came forward from under the shadow of the wide *abat jour* upon the lamp.

"Ah! Comtesse," he said, "do me the justice to believe that had I foreseen—but De Dreux was there, was he not?"

"No, he disappeared as soon as dinner was over."

Mullan, fearing that the old lady might make some awkward remark, went in search of his friend, whom he found enjoying a delightful nap in a tranquil corner of the deserted drawing-room.

"Have you formed such an inveterate habit of sleeping after dinner?" said Mullan, crossly. "Little did you dream of the panegyric chanted by Monsieur de Grosmont upon you. I can't possibly do justice to it."

"Yes," grumbled de Dreux, "I always sleep here when I find it stupid, and you must admit that our last arrival is not amusing."

"Please remember, my young friend, that you are the man of the future, and be more prudent in regard to the hours you select for your siestas. Had you but heard what he said to Madame de Dreux! You would have died of joy."

"Poor Blanche! How it must have pleased her!" said Guy, innocently.

His friend looked at him earnestly, to see if he were jesting; not a muscle in the Deputy's handsome face twitched. His countenance simply expressed the serene contentment of a man who has just enjoyed a refreshing slumber.

"Well! well!" said Mullan, "this is indeed a wonderful state of things!"

By this time everybody had assembled in the salon, where there was a good deal of loud laughter and talking. Madeline seated herself by the side of Monsieur de Grosmont, with whom she was an especial favorite; but all the tender graces and sweet ways of this fair woman were lost that night on the old gentleman.

His attention was riveted on Madame Rovey and her sister. He examined them much as if they had been Japanese monsters; they seemed to puzzle him greatly.

After a half-hour of this earnest attention, he rose and made his excuses, saying that he was greatly

fatigued. Guy offered to go with him to his room, and his services were accepted with considerable enthusiasm.

At the head of the stairs, as the old gentleman stood before his door, he turned to Guy.

"Look here, my young friend," he said in a paternal tone, "I have been saying a few words to your wife, who, I fear, did not attach to my words the importance they deserve, and I therefore address myself to you as the head of the family. Do not allow Blanche to have anything to do with women like this Englishwoman and her sister; such persons injure the tone of a house."

Guy listened in some discomfort; he did not know what was coming. Monsieur de Grosmont continued:

"Manage to dismiss those two brazen-faced women; they have no breeding nor even superficially good manners. Another time, be less indulgent, even if your wife is offended, for you must insist on having your own way when it is for the general good! Good night my dear fellow!"

He entered his room, and Guy went down stairs. He was greatly annoyed, and yet so intensely amused at the droll side of this little affair, that he could not restrain himself from telling Mullan about it.

If Monsieur de Grosmont could but have heard them laugh. But the walls were thick, and he lodged in an opposite wing.

Blanche never made the smallest allusion to the advice given by her guardian, but Guy felt all the next morning that he made a very sorry figure.

Had she liked a hearty laugh, she might have enjoyed the most innocent and legitimate vengeance, but she disdained such pleasures. By nature she was magnanimous, but Mullan was by no means equally generous, and occasionally, after his own fashion, revenged the wrongs of Madame de Dreux, by attacking Guy with covert allusions.

There was one person, however, who was greatly amused by the story which she heard as a profound secret from Mullan; after which she so watched Madame Rovey, Monsieur de Grosmont, and de Dreux himself, that the poor fellow was driven half wild. But she was a very discreet person, and she kept the secret.

An hour after breakfast the mayors of the different cantons presented themselves at the château, as had been agreed upon. The weather was detestable: one of those beating rains so frequent on the sea coast, which are apt to last twenty-four hours, and kept the guests of the château thus within its walls. Every one was listless, and weary eyes looked through the misty window-panes at the trees shrouded in mist, which looked as if weeping for the fair weather that had vanished. The wind whistled down the huge chimneys and through the wide corridors with a most dismal threatening sound.

The ladies were grouped about the salon armed with embroidery and needle-work, which had been in the bottom of their trunks ever since they left Paris, and never saw daylight except on similar occasions.

Mullan played piquet with the Comtesse, who was,

to her intense delight, winning game after game. To tell the truth, this charming dowager was the life of the circle; it was she who was endowed with real youth, and with a character which the events of life could not disturb, for the young at heart are always amiable.

Madeline glided to a chair near her husband, who was tempted to go to his room and do a good day's work, which enjoyment had not been his, since his arrival at Mesnil; but his wife gave him a look of such tenderness and of supplication, that he preferred to give up all idea of work than to leave her alone among all these people.

He took up a book, and his wife drew a low chair near to his side, and sat in such a way that she could see him and even speak to him in a low voice without attracting the attention of the others. This corner was the happiest one in the salon, and Blanche, who, as mistress of the house, was often called from the room, never went or came without laying a caressing hand on the shoulder of her friend, who would look up with a smile.

Her heart warmed as she looked at these married lovers, for Blanche was not selfish; she liked to see those about her happy.

"Here come the mayors, filing up the avenue," said Mullan, throwing down his cards. "Good heavens! What umbrellas; they are of all forms and sizes, as well as of all ages!"

Madame Rovey uttered a shrill laugh. Blanche rang, and ordered a fire to be made in the library.

"A fire in August?" cried Miss Amy. "Do you intend to cook them?"

"No, only to dry them, Mademoiselle," said Monsieur de Grosmont, with biting severity.

Miss Amy put on an exaggerated expression of mortification, but no one ventured to laugh. The visitors approached without any especial dignity, it must be admitted, for they skipped first to one side of the road, and then to the other to avoid the little pools of water. They reached the steps, and Guy went out to the hall to receive them.

"I wish we could hear them," said Madame Praxis, "it might be very amusing. I am sure they have come to ask for some colossal folly."

"I agree with you, Madame," answered Mullan. "Man is made up of follies. Yes, Miss Amy, that is so, but it is not I who say it, it was a Latin poet. And woman is much the same!"

To the horror of Monsieur de Grosmont, the young girl returned this impertinence in kind. The worthy man turned an indignant look toward Blanche, but she had vanished. In despair, the old gentleman took Mullan's seat and began to play a game of piquet with the Comtesse.

The mayors were now all assembled in the vast library. They were seated on the edges of various chairs in rigid uncomfortable positions. They were vexed beyond words that the inclemency of the day had marred the symmetry of their costumes, and injured the dignity of their appearance.

Their muddy shoes and bespattered garments robbed them of much of their assurance; they were, for the most part, small farmers, living on their own land, with education enough to read a newspaper twice in the week, and almost to understand it. The majestic appearance of Mesnil, all its luxury of appointments and service, contributed to intimidate them quite as much as the rows upon rows of books occupying the four sides of the room—books which were rarely consulted, except by Blanche.

"Gentlemen," said Monsieur de Dreux, leaning on the chimney, in which burned a huge log worthy of Christmas, "I thank you for the honor of your visit; I am profoundly, yes profoundly grateful and touched by your confidence in coming here to express your wishes to me. Be persuaded, gentlemen, that I shall do my best to satisfy you that I will direct all my efforts toward the accomplishment of your wishes, and the wishes of my country, this being the first duty of those to whom the country entrusts its destiny."

A flattering murmur rose from the municipal group; the muddy shoes moved restlessly on the carpet; then, ashamed of their audacity, were immediately thrust under their chairs again. All eyes were turned toward the Mayor of Manigamp, who, more learned than the others, had translated the *de Viris illustribus*.

"We have come, your honor," he began, in a shrill, falsetto voice, "we have come, sent by your constituents—by our constituents, who are very uneasy, and who desire a word from you which may give them new hopes."

Here he stopped. Evidently the Mayor had learned this little speech by heart, and his memory failed him. After gasping a little, he began again.

"You, who are the guardians of all our institutions, you know how deeply we in this country are attached to that which came from our fathers; they want to corrupt the land. Say you will not permit it, of course, and will add your efforts to ours. It is a question in which the purity of the morals of our nation is involved, and we call upon you to join us in their defence."

The orator became silent, probably to enjoy the effect of his discourse.

Guy, still leaning with one shoulder against the mantel, wished that he could place his back against it; this, however, was impossible, dignified as the position would have been, by reason of the height of this monumental edifice. He therefore thrust one finger between the buttons of his vest after the fashion of the day—a fashion which has certainly lasted a long time and then began his reply in tones of great dignity.

"No one, as you are well aware, gentlemen, has a stronger wish than myself to maintain that purity of morals which characterizes all honest nations. Speak, then, with all frankness; you will always find me disposed to aid you with all the weight of my authority.

The Mayors, whose stupidity had by this time vanished, opened their mouths simultaneously, which naturally created some confusion, but order was soon established.

"This is how it is, sir," said another, becoming as red as a poppy; "we are told that they intend to build a railroad. Several of our Communes are threatened, and we now come to implore you to avert this misfortune."

"Misfortune!" repeated Guy, greatly astonished; "it seems to me, on the contrary, that it is a great favor shown you by the ministry. Generally the Provinces look upon the building of a railroad as a very great favor."

"That may be, sir, others can think what they please, but we know what we want, and we do not want any of these inventions of the devil. These locomotives, as we hear them called, are unnecessary things. They are not alive, and yet they move, and consequently must have something wrong about them," answered the Breton, with the proverbial obstinacy of his race. "Our Curé said Satan had a hand in these railroads, and we came to say sir, that we wanted none of them."

The educated Mayor, who knew something of Latin, here took the words from the mouth of his colleague. "If this were all," he said, with a little air of disdain, "it would not much matter; but there is worse, still. The building of such a road would bring a crowd of strangers here, and they have ways which make us shudder. They drink and swear like pagans. You understand, sir, that such things cannot be permitted in his Commune by a Mayor who respects himself and the people he governs."

"And then, interrupted a third, "there is another thing. When they have laid out their track, as they call it, it is quite as likely as not to go through our gardens and barns, our fields and our houses! It is perfectly abominable. Now just look at me; I have a most lovely orchard, none could be finer; I make six hundred francs worth of cider every year. They will certainly cut it in two! Now, I ask you, what I should do with the two halves of my orchard with a railroad running through the middle? No, sir; we want no such thing among us. And we expect you to tell the Minister as much. And you must prevent this great misfortune."

"Yes, it is for that we elected you," chanted all the peasants, in a loud chorus. By this time they were no longer afraid to move their feet. Standing around Guy, they began to crowd upon him; he disengaged himself promptly.

"I do not understand, my friends," he said, retreating to his stronghold against the chimney. "Do you wish me to ask the Minister of Public Works to change the route of this railway, and carry it more to the west?"

"To the west or the east, we do not care which!" cried his constituents, altogether, "provided it is no where near us. We will not have it!"

"It was your predecessor who did this harm," said a shrewd-looking fellow, with gray eyes; we all told him not to do anything of the kind, but he persisted. He did everything that came into his head, pretend-

ing that it was for our good. Fortunately for us, he is dead ; for I am very much afraid that he would have been again elected had he lived. His death procured us the pleasure of having you for our Deputy, Monsieur de Dreux, for you are a good and honest man, who understands our tastes."

Guy frowned ; this speech, with its covert menace, was approved of by the others, and perfectly understood by the Deputy himself. If the next elections shelved him, he would find himself in a most disagreeable position. He liked politics, being a Deputy had its advantages, and not to be renominated would be a dire blow to him.

"My friends," he said, with a majestic wave of his hand, which enjoined silence, "I cannot give you any positive assurance, but I will see the Minister."

The noise of a chair overturned in the next room made Monsieur de Dreux start. It was through that room that Blanche usually came when she worked with him—her little salon communicating thus directly with her husband's library.

"My wife is there," he said to himself ; "so much the better ; she will hear all that is said, and I shall be spared the trouble of repeating it all to her. I will see the Minister," he said aloud, "and I will submit your objections to him."

"We do not care what the Minister says," muttered one man ; "if he sends any workmen here we will demolish all they do as fast as they accomplish it!"

"No violence, my friends, no violence!" said Guy,

authoritatively. "Common sense and good behavior are the best arguments you can offer. I will do my best to serve your wishes, and I hope—"

A servant entered with a letter on a tray.

"A Ministerial communication," said the man, aloud.

"A reply is required."

The Mayors looked at each other and then for the letter, for which they had the greatest respect, regarding it as a sort of firman. At this remote period, when peasants destroyed railroads and curés exorcised locomotives, a ministerial document was a matter of the highest importance, and they were pleased to have seen one.

Guy broke the seal, and on a paper which he knew he read these words in his wife's writing :

"Come to me one moment, and do not say one word more until you have seen me."

Monsieur de Dreux was greatly troubled, and asked himself what he could have said. It must have been something very much out of the way for Blanche to summon him in this fashion. Being quite prudent, however, for a man can't dabble in politics, even in the smallest degree, without becoming more or less prudent, he said to the servant, who stood respectfully waiting :

"Very good; I will come. These gentlemen will excuse me for a moment," said Guy. "Commands like these permit no delay."

He left the room with a dignified step, ordered some refreshments to be sent to his constituents, and coming

back through the corridor, entered the salon where his wife awaited him.

“What on earth is the matter?” he asked.

She dragged him to the further end of the room and said, in a whisper:

“My dear husband, you are very near allowing yourself to be dragged into making a promise which you would regret before the day was over. I know you, Guy, and I know that if your heart is appealed to one can obtain anything from you, but you must be firm!”

“What on earth do you mean? These idiots don’t want their railroad—so much the worse for them, that is all!”

Blanche in utter consternation dropped both hands in her lap. If her husband did not understand and grasp the situation now, all was lost, his political future and his growing reputation. De Dreux would never be forgiven if he were weak enough to ask that the route of the railway should be changed. The benefit for which all intelligent France clamored as for manna—the benefit which another now dead had obtained with so much difficulty, Guy was about to repudiate. If he did this, it were to place him at once among the incapable, among those who are without sense and discrimination.

The despairing gesture, the reproachful eyes, said all this in the most eloquent manner. Guy fortunately read only a portion of that which they conveyed.

“You would be disappointed, I suppose, for the

railroad would make our place much more accessible; but this would be a small benefit after all, and the prospect of not being nominated at the next elections, you know—”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Blanche, impatiently. “That has nothing to do with it! If your constituents are displeased with you and refuse to re-nominate you, you can easily secure your election elsewhere—at Ramécy, for example—and the deputy who had been dropped because he had refused to ask that a railroad should be relinquished for which the grant had been already given, would be unanimously elected. Can’t you see that? The future of the world is in railroads. Lecomte said as much yesterday, and you know that he is not given to wasting his words. You have eloquence. Prove to these simpletons that their fortunes lie in that direction; that they will sell their land at a very high price. They like money, touch that chord! The workmen will board with the peasants, another source of revenue. The products of the country will double in price; tell them that. Then too, they hate the people of Morabors; there is an hereditary hatred between the two places. Tell them that if they object, their railroad shall go by Morabors. You told me only last summer how great the advantage would be to the whole district of such a line.”

“I?” said Guy, who had never thought of it.

“Yes, coming home from Manigamp, the day of the fête. Be faithful to your convictions, Guy—fling to the breeze the flag of Progress and Wealth, and

in twenty years these same simpletons will order a statute of yourself on the pedestal of which these words will be engraved: 'He inaugurated the first railroad in Brittany.' Go now. I shall be listening, and I am proud of you."

She pushed him out of the room, and then took her seat in the open door veiled with heavy curtains, which communicated with the library.

With her hands clasped, she uttered a sigh which was almost one of agony.

"It is my fate always to lie," she thought, "always to feign. And why? Ah! how weary I am!"

Guy's voice, rich and melodious, now fell upon her ear. She listened with bated breath.

"I said to you just now, gentlemen, that I would lay your objections before the Minister. You can judge of the extent of my devotion by this willingness on my part to serve you; but you will please to remember, gentlemen, that the hand which opens to shower benefits upon you is not always ready to receive again those same benefits."

A murmur of disapproval rose from the group. Guy waved his hand gracefully, and all was silent again.

"Suppose, gentlemen, that in spite of all my efforts I were unable to alter the route of this railway which, to use your own expression, now threatens us. Will not such acts of rebellion, reprehensible in every point of view, render us totally unworthy of any further favors from the administration? The time is near at hand when work on the road must begin; in a month

probably the pioneers will appear in this quiet, peaceful land. Would this be a convincing proof that my demand is refused, and that the misfortune is unaverted? No, gentlemen, no. Such works have been begun and then abandoned, and in that case the proprietors whose land has been taken receives ample indemnification. Do not fear for yourselves or your families any danger in association with the workmen who will come here. Be persuaded that the good morals and religious principles inculcated by your fraternal care will preserve our village from the deteriorating effects of these men, who after all may be much better than you are disposed to believe. These workmen too, will make but a brief sojourn; but brief as it will be, there will be one danger in regard to which I wish to warn you. The inns are very few, and they will be obliged to board with the inhabitants—”

“Zounds!” muttered one of the mayors.

“Yes, gentlemen, but do not be concerned, they will pay and pay well for their lodgings. These peasants, who are willing to take them in, will be well paid. The presence of these strangers will be a great source of benefit to the country. If they should chance to remain here several years, as is sometimes the case in such enterprises when the road is a long one, you would have reason to rejoice on account of your increased prosperity. Surely, gentlemen, you must be aware that every district through which runs a long line of railway, is rapidly and surely enriched; but as I am aware of your principles and your disinterested-

ness, I will abstain from dwelling on these secondary considerations."

"Pray tell us, Sir," asked the shrewd peasant, who had once before spoken, "how a railroad can enrich the country?"

"Simply by bringing it nearer Paris, that great center—the gulf which devours everything, and where the butter for which you are glad to get twelve sous sells for two francs."

"Two francs!" repeated the group, filled with awe.

"Yes, of course; but what of that? You prefer your honest poverty to a fortune acquired by means which, though rapid, are repugnant to you. I respect your principles too much to try to modify them. Now here is Monsieur Grindaud, for example," and Guy nodded toward the shrewd, gray eyed mayor, "he makes on his farm some six hundred pounds of butter per annum; he prefers to lose the enormous sums he would be sure to make when the railway was built, with a station almost at his door. You are aware, gentlemen, that the station is to be erected not a league from Mesnil, and precisely opposite Monsieur Grindaud—"

"That would be twelve hundred francs," murmured that individual. "And eggs, sir, are they dear in Paris too?"

"They sell for double what we pay for them here," answered Guy, carelessly. "I will not detain you any longer, gentlemen. The inhabitants of Morabors have been trying for two years to obtain the promise that

this railroad should run through their village, and owing to this fact I hope to have no difficulty in carrying out your wishes. They have already built a market-house to use as their central depot for the products of their Canton, and as their property will double in value, they of course—”

“Excuse me, sir, but does property double in value when there is a railroad?”

“Most certainly, and often its value is quadrupled. Suppose, for example, that they should want your house, Monsieur Morat, for a station. In that case, they would pay you six or seven thousand francs, while to-day if you wished to sell it, you could not get two.”

The peasants looked at each other, not knowing what to say. Presently the boldest spoke.

“We never heard a word of all this before,” he said, “and it seems to me,” he added, turning to his companions, “that before deciding, we ought to think a little of the good side of the question as well as the bad side.”

“Certainly,” answered the peasants, hastily. “We must have time to reflect.”

“You are your own masters,” said Monsieur de Dreux, with a slight yawn, for he began to be intolerably bored. “In the meantime, permit me to wish you all good luck at the fair, which takes place, I believe, on the 30th of this month.”

“Many thanks, sir,” cried the Mayors, in chorus.

“Cattle wont sell here nowadays,” added one man, “everybody has enough.”

"Your neighbors' cattle wont hang long on the hands of their owners," answered de Dreux. "They are long headed fellows and know how to set their sails in order to catch all the wind that is blowing. They will be able, too, to finish their Cathedral."

This was a severe blow to all the mayors of the Arrondissements of Manigamp.

"The Cathedral!" they cried, "will that ever be finished?"

The deputation went away without having come to any final decision, Guy repeating as they left him, that he would speak to the Minister. In the court-yard they opened their umbrellas and held an animated discussion. After about ten minutes, the gray eyed man came back and asked to speak to Guy.

Monsieur de Dreux had been watching his constituents from the window of the library, favoring Blanche, who stood just behind him, with humorous reflections on the appearance and gestures of these excellent men. When admitted to Guy's presence, one of them said boldly:

"We have been thinking, sir, that it is best not to be in too great a hurry to speak to the Minister. We must have a little time to look about."

"I am here," answered Guy, "only to obey you," and he bit his lips to conceal a smile. "When you have decided, you will let me know."

"Precisely, sir, and we are very much obliged to you."

The umbrellas were soon seen going down the avenue.

"Well!" said Guy, going back to his wife, "it looks to me as if I had won the day."

"Your words were golden," Blanche answered. "Let me congratulate you!"

"These good people," said Guy, "are singularly dull; but after all, they are not to blame; their clergy are so fanatical."

Blanche looked at him to see if he were in earnest, and turned from him with a feeling of despair.

"Let us go back to the salon," she said; "they will be asking what has become of us."

Much pleased with what he had done, Guy went out of the room, she following him submissively as a dog follows his master.

CHAPTER IX.

SOLICITATIONS.

AN entire week elapsed before Monsieur de Dreux made any attempt to stem the flood of eloquence which poured from his lips—which were Athenian, if only in form. His little speech to the Mayors had opened the sluice gates, and Guy continued to make pretty speeches and to round his periods. He enjoyed the music of his own words, and for some time the lofty ceilings of Mesnil echoed the sacred words—"the liberty of the masses, Progress—Liberty—Work!"

These little oratorical experiments had an effect on all the members of the household; but the effect on each person was very different. Gérard Lecomte listened in silence, and asked what the deuce it all meant. Madeline opened wide her big eyes and thought that Guy de Dreux was certainly very much changed. Madame Rovey and her sister were greatly bored and made no attempt to conceal it; the Comtesse Praxis listened with mingled perplexity and admiration. Mullan laughed heartily under his moustache, and Blanche was so cold and reserved that Monsieur de Grosmont felt that he ought to say a few words of mild reproach to her.

"I cannot understand, my child," he said to her one

day, "why you affect such scorn for the generous, enlarged ideas advanced by your husband. These ideas are not of my time. The generation to which I had the honor to belong, and which numbers many illustrious names had other cares; but now that these are the order of the day, and great minds busy themselves in bearing light to the most benighted races, as Monsieur de Dreux just now said, and said so well, I must confess that I am puzzled by your indifference to the principles by which his conduct is regulated. In fact, my dear Blanche, if I did not know you so well, I should think you had a tendency to withdraw into yourself, a tendency—which pray excuse the words, looks too much like selfishness."

Blanche received this last blow with meekness. She had felt many others. Enveloped in apparent coldness, she had done her best to conceal her real feelings from the eyes of the world, and had succeeded.

That she should be supposed to be selfish and indifferent, mattered little to her; the first essential of her life was to adorn her husband with all these qualities which she took from herself.

All her generous impulses, her brain and far-sighted cleverness, all those elements which go to make up the character of a superior man, belong to Guy, while she, passive, submissive and weak, was content to walk in his shadow.

One fine day she was sauntering in the garden, admiring her roses, which she loved as if they had been children, when she saw Guy coming toward her.

"I intend to reproach you," he said, with a smile that belied his words. "You love your flowers too much, dear Blanche, which prevents you from being a good neighbor."

She looked at him with a little astonishment.

"Yes, you know how important it is for me to stand well with the Cabinet. You are perfectly well aware that personal friendships have their weight in the affairs of State, and now, when we are fortunate enough to have Monsieur de Fresnes so unexpectedly for a neighbor, you have not once invited him to dinner."

Blanche, at the first word that her husband had uttered, knew as well what was coming as if she had read it in an open book; her color rose, and she cut a frightful gash in her most beautiful rose-bush before she answered.

Guy was right, this time, as she well knew, and there was really nothing for her to say.

"Do you not like him?" asked Guy. "Have you any objection to inviting him here?"

"No," answered Blanche, "none, whatever."

"Shall we ask him next week, then? Monday?"

"Very good," said his wife. "That will do very well."

Guy lifted her hand to his lips and turned on his heel, but presently a sting of remorse brought him back.

"I am afraid," he said, very kindly, "that you do not wish to receive Monsieur de Fresnes; if you really dislike him—"

"I do not dislike him," answered Blanche, with more than a shade of impatience. "I told you the precise truth. I am not eloquent, you know, and I simply try to say things honestly and sincerely, and hope that they will be taken in the same spirit. You can ask Monsieur de Fresnes for Monday; he will be received as an honored guest."

Guy thanked her warmly; his warmth, however, was superficial, and then returned to his business, which, just at this time, consisted in smoking delicious cigars on the terrace, protected from the sun by a striped awning.

Blanche continued to gather the roses, but her thoughts were far away. She had a sense of fear, as of the approach of a danger which one feels to be inevitable, and yet she dared not put the nature of this danger into words. The children came to her; she took them in her arms and embraced them passionately. Then, entering the château, she sent to Paris to order certain things necessary for Monday's dinner.

CHAPTER X.

A MINISTERIAL HOLIDAY.

"**T**RY and behave well, ladies," said Mullan, that evening, folding his arms with an air of lofty superiority. "We are to have a Minister to dinner, and you must not forget yourselves."

"Is it to me that you offer this advice?" said Amy, with a deliciously impertinent air.

"By no means; I intended it for my venerable and venerated friend, Madame Praxis."

"Venerable yourself!" cried the Comtesse. "What age do you take me to be, young man?"

"Just the age you look, my dear lady, and you know that I consider you perfection! I have the bump of veneration."

"Which I have not!" cried Amy.

"So much the worse for you, Mademoiselle!" muttered Monsieur de Grosmont, from behind his newspaper.

"I did not make him say that," murmured Mullan, leaning toward the rebellious, pouting Amy. "Monday is the great day," he continued; "I hope you are all prepared for this stupendous event."

"Is he married, this gentleman?" asked Madame Rovey, from the depths of her chair, lifting as she spoke, her beautiful arm, bare to the shoulder, except for some beautiful bracelets.

"No, Madame, not yet," answered Mullan, "and he is a great catch, for, upon my word, I don't know any advantage in this world which is not his. But you will soon judge for yourself."

Guy rose and went out on the terrace; he thought Mullan rude to his friends, but he had no idea how to prevent it.

"I shall certainly marry this Phenix of ministers, myself," said Madame Praxis. "Yes, young people, you may laugh. I will marry him to prevent some one doing so who is not worthy of such a wonder, and when I succeed in finding the perfect woman who would suit him, be she maid or widow, then I will go quietly out of this world with the noble consciousness of duties fulfilled, as our friend De Dreux would say. By the way, De Dreux, you are infecting all of us with your eloquence, and I for one, am truly grateful."

"Most happy," answered the young Deputy. "Most happy to have served you in any way."

"You are perfecting us," answered the Comtesse, "and why not? Everything is being perfected in these days—mowing machines, churns, corkscrews, everything in fact except man——"

"Oh! man!" muttered Mullan, with an air of disgust.

"And woman," concluded the Comtesse, triumphantly. "Now your friend De Fresnes is so near perfection——"

"That he touches it?" asked Mullan.

"At all events he must be careful, or he will certainly be spoiled in this frivolous circle."

"I think we ought to be placed at a side table," said Amy.

"An excellent plan!" grumbled Monsieur de Grosmont.

But Blanche rattled the newspaper she was reading so noisily that this last pleasing remark did not reach the ears of the young girl.

"After all," said Mullan, philosophically, "it is not our fault if we are imperfect beings. Everybody can't rise to the height reached by De Fresnes. For my own part, I am quite content to look on with the admiration he deserves, but I am not disposed to try and imitate him. I never care to waste time and strength in useless efforts."

His eyes turned toward Blanche, who was seated at the other end of the salon. It was she who, in his eyes, represented perfection.

It is a strange feeling which lingers in the heart of a man of intellect for a woman whom he has once loved, whom he has continued to see, and who is and has always been the incarnation of purity. There is a combination of all emotions, respect, friendship, regret, and withal a certain jealousy, as keen as the scent of a dog, with which he analyzes the sentiments of all who approach her.

Mullan would not have admitted that he had any feeling of this kind toward Monsieur de Fresnes. He knew that this man was vastly superior to the majority of those around Blanche; he knew that he was fastidious to an extreme, and that every act of the young

minister's life was governed by the most delicate and chivalric honor. He knew, although De Fresnes was scarce forty, that he owed his high position to no intrigues, to no services rendered of that secret kind which are not recognized in diplomacy, but which are none the less necessary and valuable. He did know, however, that Lucien de Fresnes had been unanimously called upon to fill the position he occupied, at a time when every one felt the need of repose and security; when each party wanted time to collect themselves, and felt that power could only be confided to some one whose honesty was incorruptible.

All this Mullan well knew, but he felt absolutely convinced at the same time that if Lucien should meet Madame de Dreux on familiar terms, and know her as she really was, he would fall in love with her. And she? Would she love him? Had she lived five long years, happy and tranquil to all appearance, but, as Mullan well knew, in reality utterly isolated, without feeling the need of more tender sympathy and affection than that which she received from Mullan himself, and her other friends.

This was precisely that which Mullan did not choose to admit. The moral elevation of sentiment, which had of late attained such rapid growth within himself, made him dread to detect any weakness in this woman, whose purity was to him her highest attraction. In a word, Mullan was in the situation of an amateur, who sees some awkward ignoramus lay his hand on a china vase which he knows to be fragile,

and which he himself dares not touch lest he should see it crumble into dust at his feet.

One thing might have reassured him, but on the contrary it disturbed him. Madame de Dreux, instead of showing Monsieur de Fresnes such cordiality and kindness as his distinguished position and agreeable personal qualities would have seemed to demand, always received him with coldness, leaving to her husband all the duties of a host, and all the encouragement which the minister received.

Blanche was too wise, and too ambitious for Guy to be guilty of this error without some reason, which was all sufficient for herself. Did she dislike this minister. Mullan wished to believe this, but his reason refused to accept this explanation, and he finally believed that Madame de Dreux avoided Monsieur de Fresnes because she was afraid of loving him. And he was right.

Many and many a time, when she listened to Lucien de Fresnes—for Blanche listened much and spoke little—she felt a sudden thrill.

“That is precisely what I think,” she said, as she thought over his words. “It is thus that I comprehend life. It seems to me that I hear my own thoughts put into words, words more authoritative and more eloquent than any I could find.”

Another woman, more indulgent to herself, might easily have been carried away by this sympathy, but Madame de Dreux sternly repelled it. She shrank from any comparison with her husband, and at once

realized that this man, whose views and sentiments so nearly resembled her own, was most dangerous to her. She always knew when he was looking at her, without meeting his eyes, which she always carefully avoided. She listened to the voice of her conscience, which warned her of her peril. She measured the depth of the abyss before she was even upon the brink. The man whom she would gladly have associated with her existence was not Guy, it was Lucien. Guy was a mere phantom, the *mannequin* on whom she had draped her wishes, her aspirations, and her tenderness. He, who was the incarnation of all her dreams, was now before her—now that it was too late. The poor woman mourned over the delusions which had caused her to wreck her life.

But Madame de Dreux was not the woman to spend much time in the contemplation of a hopeless situation. Not being able to alter her destiny, she determined to see Monsieur de Fresnes as little as possible, and above all things to seem to him to be a perfectly happy wife. Her pride had always led her to adopt this rôle, and in his presence she was still more determined to do so.

Pity from him would have been intolerable, and his love, awakened only by his pity, would have been worse than his dislike.

Monsieur de Fresnes had been prevented from coming to Mesnil by her coldness; he feared lest he should be regarded as an intruder, and still more, that he should seem to take advantage of his political posi-

tion to enter the house of a man who certainly needed him. Like everybody else, except Blanche, he believed in Guy's merits, but more clear-sighted than others, he had detected a weak spot in the armor of this young politician. In the heat of a discussion, arguments carefully prepared and fine phrases may have their weight; but in ordinary conversations an intelligent man soon discovered that, well as Guy talked politics, he could on other occasions say very strange things. It was at such times that De Fresnes noticed that Blanche looked at her husband with the same expression that she might have looked at the tunic of Nessus. Guy did not seem to be greatly troubled, however; he only became entirely silent.

"Can it be," thought De Fresnes, "that this eloquent man is eloquent on only one subject?"

To this question succeeded another, which was inevitable.

"It must be his wife who inspires him, and yet she never speaks!"

A little reflection proved to Lucien that if she did inspire her husband, she would naturally be silent herself. He relapsed into deep thought, from which he aroused himself with a sigh.

He had purchased that spring, a small estate not far from Mesnil, partly because the situation suited him, but more because he was inexplicably attracted by the vicinity of Monsieur and Madame de Dreux. The calm beauty of the latter, her entire freedom from coquetry, had already inspired him with tender admi-

ration; but if this woman were as clever as he now suspected, his curiosity as well as his admiration was aroused. He made two or three visits, and then dared come no more. The unexpected invitation now coming from Guy, gave him very great pleasure.

In the country, the smallest incidents assume the greatest importance. For the last three weeks Monsieur de Fresnes had dined alone in his large dining-room, whose walls were covered with the most frightful paper which he had not yet had time to replace.

The thought that for one evening at least he was not only to get out of that gloomy room, but was also to dine in the companionship of young and pretty women, raised his spirits to such a degree that he ordered his horse, and galloped off to Mesnil.

“Monsieur de Fresnes!” announced the servants as he threw open the door of the salon.

A light rustle of silken garments saluted this unexpected visitor.

“When one talks of—” murmured Mullan, rising slowly from his chair.

Blanche was already standing. Lucien bowed low before her as he lifted with ceremonious courtesy that cold, beautiful hand to his lips. Guy pulled up a chair, and was speedily engaged in a conversation with “his Minister.”

“It was necessary, it seems, that you should be invited before you could come to see us,” said Madame Praxis, in a tone of friendly reproach.

She always said what she pleased to every one, and was allowed entire license of tongue.

"Your absence," said Monsieur de Grosmont, "has been greatly deplored, but we know the claims—"

"Yes," interrupted Madame Rovey, heedlessly, "one is so often embarrassed by people who persist in coming to see you, whether you want them or not, that to find one that errs in the opposite way, is a great delight."

Monsieur de Grosmont's eyes were fixed on the fair widow with such intensity, that even Guy noticed it.

"I always knew she was a little stupid," thought Mullan, "but I did her injustice—she is more than a little stupid."

Blanche could not repress a smile; the fixed look on her husband's face, the utter wonder in the round eyes of her guardian, Mullan's evident satisfaction, formed so delightful a whole, while Madame Rovey's utter unconsciousness completed the picture.

After the arrival of Monsieur de Fresnes, Blanche felt suddenly young again. She was tempted to laugh aloud, to commit some girlish folly, to leap and run as dogs do on the return of their masters. She began to talk with a grace and enthusiasm that reminded Mullan of the early days of her married life, when she, just emancipated from the conventionalities by which she had been previously bound, opened her heart to her friends.

The Comtesse Praxis had the same idea, and their

eyes met with a smile, which on Mullan's part was not free from irony.

"No visit of mine ever excited her like that!"

Guy was in no degree astonished; he knew his wife well, had seen her in every mood, and furthermore, had no memory for dates.

When, a half hour later, Lucien de Fresnes felt like a man who had been for a little while at the theatre, but went away without having seen the beginning of the end of the play:

"What a strange woman!" he said to himself, "and if I am not mistaken, those beautiful eyes have learned the secret of tears.

CHAPTER XI.

A DINNER PARTY.

A DINNER in a large and handsome dining-room may be a very pretty thing, particularly when the background of the feast is the ocean. The long windows were thrown wide open, so that the sunset sky was fully displayed, flecked as it was by those faint, copper-colored clouds, which are common on the Atlantic coast at that hour. The light came through quivering branches, and overhanging vines, touching here and there the polished surface of a leaf shining like metal, and thence gliding over the billowy masses of silken skirts as they lay around the chairs occupied by the ladies seated at the table, bringing out the hue of a pearl or a jewel. The natural flowers on the table or worn in the hair, seemed almost transparent.

It has been said that a dinner should never take place except by candle-light. Those who said so never tried one on the seashore at sunset.

Monsieur de Fresnes enjoyed this fête given in his honor most thoroughly. The ladies were dressed with extreme elegance, for they were glad to have an opportunity of being so. Women as a rule, never go away for six weeks without carrying one dress "which probably will not be put on, but something might happen!"

This something always happens and the precious robe sees the light, and with it certain accessories and jewels too fine for every day.

Madame Rovey, on coming down stairs five minutes before dinner, "for the first time in her life," as Monsieur de Grosmont grumblingly asserted, raised her eyebrows when she saw Madeline in her crisp white muslin and laces with cherry-colored ribbons, feeling that her own richer toilet was not half as effective.

This assemblage of elegance, to which a man in Paris is so accustomed that he does not notice it, became in these surroundings something exceedingly picturesque.

Dinner was over and the party went out on the terrace, where the sun now hidden behind a bank of clouds heaped low against the horizon, offered a superb spectacle like an immense fire. They amused themselves for some time watching the crumbling towers and palaces, the rapidly shifting mountains and caverns, and then they formed themselves into groups as usual.

Miss Amy, who had long since given up teasing Mullan, took care not to go very far from Monsieur de Fresnes, and assumed a graceful position with her clear cut profile against the sky.

"This time, my dear, you are throwing away your time," whispered the Comtesse kindly in her ear, as she passed her in going back to the house to play her game of bezique with Monsieur de Grosmont.

Miss Amy pretended not to hear, and yet she was not deaf.

"I suppose you are anxious to return to Paris?" said Lucien to Madame de Dreux.

"No," she replied, "I love the country. I love the repose here."

Without knowing it, she had dropped her voice. A certain weariness was perceptible in her low tones.

"But you," she added, "must find this solitude very irksome?"

He smiled.

"No," he said, "I like the country, I like the sea, and I like also the repose which we men rarely get."

Blanche thought to herself that, woman as she was, she might say the same thing, and singularly enough was annoyed that she could not say so aloud. Up to this moment she had been prudent by instinct.

"Yes," she said, "your position is a most exacting one, and do what you will, you are nearly sure of displeasing everybody."

"Precisely, if I allow my conscience to be my guide," answered Monsieur de Fresnes, with a smile. "It is as you say, an exacting position, and also a perilous one. There are but few who, entering political life, succeed in being a credit to their families and an honor to their country."

The slight bow with which he concluded his sentence, showed Blanche that he intended an allusion to her husband in these last words. She smiled graciously as she slightly inclined her head, but with-

out appearing to attach much importance to this compliment.

"The usual result," she said, "the reward for all these exertions is generally base ingratitude, if not absolute hatred!"

"What does that matter?" answered Monsieur de Fresnes, gravely. He too had lowered his voice, as if this conversation had been a confidential one. "It is often hatred, sometimes contempt, and always ingratitude; but if some few encourage you living, and weep you dead, if these few are those you love and respect, is it not a good thing to live and die in the accomplishment of one's duty, and in the hope of a future for our country which shall realize all our dreams?"

"We shall not see their realization," said Blanche.

"What of that? Progress has no age. We are the stones with which it builds its walls."

"Stones do not suffer, and Progress is so slow!" answered Madame de Dreux.

A long silence followed. The day had slowly faded into night. On the right a light-house shone at regular intervals. Blanche sat watching it. The dark sky looked more intensely black and more impenetrable with each momentary flash. Monsieur de Fresnes followed the eyes of his hostess.

"Progress," he said, "is like that light-house. After taking one onward step Humanity falls back again, and in despair at its fall believes that never before has it sunk so low; but each struggle is like a flash of

light, which all combined creates a beacon that points out our danger and guides us safely into port."

Miss Amy rose and retired from the scene. Madame Praxis was right—her time was wasted here. This man was insupportable with his metaphysical talk. At the door she met Guy.

"Where is Monsieur de Fresnes?" he asked.

"You did not give him to me to keep," she replied, with her usual abruptness. "Nevertheless, I will inform you that he is on the terrace with Madame de Dreux, who will certainly take a frightful cold while she listens to his lectures on light-houses."

"Light-houses!" repeated Guy, quite amazed.

"Yes, and I assure you that the conversation struck me as dull enough to be on politics."

She passed on, and De Dreux saw his wife approaching with the Minister. When close to her husband, Blanche started.

"I did not see you," she said.

They all went into the salon together. There was music and some brilliant conversation. It was midnight when Monsieur de Fresnes went away, determined to come again as soon as possible. Never had the paper in his dining-room been half as hideous as the next morning when he sat at his solitary breakfast.

"Take it into my library," he said to his valet. "I will never eat here again, the room is too ugly."

His library looked out on the sea. He installed himself at the window from which he, leaning out, could see Mesnil. He leaned out more than once that day.

He went to the château again that week. It was a visit demanded by politeness, which he found very agreeable, but was not gratified as he had hoped to be, by having an opportunity to talk with Blanche.

After this his visits became frequent, and with an astuteness quite worthy of his political aspirations, he became quite intimate with Gerard Lecomte, whom he frequently invited to dinner.

In a short time Monsieur de Fresnes had become the friend of the house. Guy was delighted, and manifested his joy with so much boyishness that Blanche could not refrain from a reproof.

"One would think to hear you," she said, "that the protection of this gentleman were indispensable to your happiness. Ah! my dear husband, you are quite as good as he!"

"My dear!" cried Guy, with a gesture of passionate protestation.

"So far as politics are concerned, I mean."

"Do you really think so?" asked Monsieur de Dreux, with *naïveté*.

"Of course I do! Make him your friend if you can; he pleases you. I am willing that it should be so, but it is not necessary to make such an exhibition of your sentiments."

"Blanche, it is not that he pleases me," said Guy, entreatingly, "it is that he is useful to me."

Blanche turned her back upon him before he had finished his phrase.

His temper was a little disturbed at this, and he

went with the story of his troubles to Mullan, his usual confidant.

"I think it is too bad," he said, as he concluded. "I become quite intimate with a man of influence, who is quite disposed to exercise that influence in my behalf. A man who is amiable and thoroughly well-bred, whose society I really enjoy. And my wife can't endure him."

"Tut! tut!" said Mullan, "you exaggerate—she does like him."

"No, I assure you, you are mistaken. Let me tell you what I have thought sometimes."

"Go on," answered his friend, trembling lest by some strange chance his friend for once in his life had divined the truth.

"Well! I have thought she was jealous of him."

"In what way? I do not understand."

"She thinks he has too much influence over me. She is jealous of him in that way."

"Oh!" answered Mullan. "But I think you are mistaken. Madame de Dreux is too intelligent—"

"Too intelligent for what?" asked the young deputy, when his friend hesitated.

"Not to see that a debutant like you must have some one to lean on, for a while at least. Pray let me hear no more of this last whim of yours."

"Come now, Mullan, you have a good deal of influence over my wife. Make her understand that her determination to detest this poor De Fresnes worries me, and that I shall never get on if she does not show him more cordiality."

"Very good, I will tell her this," answered Mullan, impatiently.

This gentleman kept his promise. The next day, finding himself alone with Blanche, he suddenly said:

"De Dreux wishes you to make yourself more agreeable to De Fresnes."

"And do you?" asked the lady, turning toward him with an impatient gesture.

"Would you be very much astonished if I, too, should advise you to be more amiable to him?"

Blanche looked at him. A recollection of the past, which had long since been forgotten, came back to her.

"Yes," she said, in a calm, steady voice, "I should be very much astonished."

"Then you would make a great mistake, dear Madame."

He took her hand affectionately in his.

"I am an old rover," he said; "I have wandered through the highways and byways of life, where my predecessors have left more or less wool on the briars, and I have learned many things. Permit me to tell you that I love you very sincerely. In the name of this affection which—you have probably forgotten this, but I have not—has been occasionally more demonstrative in past times than it ought to have been, I beg you not to contradict your husband on this point. He complained to me to-day, and soon he will complain to others, and as an antipathy to a man like de Fresnes is perfectly inconceivable to the majority of people,

they will think that your coldness is affected. Be wise, my dear friend, be wise in season, and avoid all extremes. Ah! I can give you many a lesson of wisdom. Just think of it! Who would ever have believed it?"

He was apparently in jest, but he spoke a little faster than usual, and his voice trembled.

"Very good," answered Blanche. "You seem to have formed a conspiracy against me, and I surrender. Only beg my husband not to say any more to me on the subject, for to hear him talk any more about it would be beyond my strength."

"I will attend to your wishes," answered Mullan.

When Madame de Dreux was alone, she extended her arms and drew a long breath.

"Falsehoods! Falsehoods!" she said, clasping her beautiful hands. "Is there never to be an end to them? Shall I ever have the right to speak the truth? Other women lie from vanity; I, because it is my duty to screen my husband's shortcomings!"

The next day, about six o'clock, Monsieur de Fresnes passed under the terrace at Mesnil. In one corner, which he well knew, a slender form was leaning forward with her eyes riveted on all the splendors of the sea, which looked like molten gold. How many times he, concealed by a tree or a rock, had watched this lovely profile leaning over the balustrade, on which so many tempests had beaten! He remembered, too, that as he approached she had invariably departed without any affectation of haste, but yet rapidly enough to obviate the necessity of returning his salutation.

But this day she did not seem to have seen him, for she sat motionless as if carved from stone. If he could have read the heart within this statue he would have seen how much this immobility cost this haughty woman. But he suspected nothing of this.

Surprised and greatly pleased, he rode up close to the wall, but she did not give him the hand that lay on the balustrade.

"Good evening, Madame," he said, deferentially.

"Good evening," answered Blanche. "You are on your way home?"

He reined in his impatient horse.

"Yes, I have had a charming ride. Was there ever a lovelier night?"

"Lovely indeed! When will you dine with us again?"

"Whenever you deign to ask me."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, if you will allow me."

They were both silent for some minutes, each feeling that there was something odd under this apparently commonplace conversation.

"You like this spot?" he said, at last. "I have seen you here so many times."

Blanche drew back a little. She was already reproaching herself for her unnecessary cordiality to this man, against whom she wished, at all cost, to defend herself.

"From a distance, I mean," continued Monsieur de Fresnes, "this terrace needed a chatelaine to modify its precise regularity."

This was not in the least what he had intended to say. He looked at Blanche, and she at the sea. A faint color rose and fell upon her cheeks, following the irregular pulsations of her heart.

"To-morrow, then," he said, as he gave his horse the rein.

She waved an adieu. At the turn of the road he looked back with a last salutation.

She threw herself back.

"Ah! Good Heavens!" she said to herself. "What was I doing? It is impossible for me to be so false to my instincts as to agree to be the slave of another's will. I shall never release myself from this mass of falsehoods. I shall see him to-morrow; how, then, can I be unhappy to-day? I dare not say, even to myself, that I am so."

She pressed her hand on her heart to still its beatings, and then laying her head on the rough granite wall, wept like a child.

The next day was a long one to Lucien de Fresnes. He placed his desk at a window, from which he could see Mesnil, and he listened to the voice of his own heart.

In vain had Blanche defended herself; she had not succeeded in vailing her true self from this man who was so eager and curious to know her. Hidden as was her soul, and discreet as were her words, they, like antique statues, allowed their perfect outlines to be seen.

Lucien felt that in Madame de Dreux was concealed

another woman, called Blanche. He noticed how the amethystine eyes of this woman changed when she spoke to her children, or when she talked to her friend. He understood that to the privileged few this woman was very different from her whom the world knew.

An ardent longing awoke within him, to be one of those few; one of those whom she loved. Under what title he should be admitted, he did not take the trouble to ask himself.

The invitation given by Madame de Dreux, opened to him, as he believed, an entrance into her close-shut heart. But such was his respect for Madame de Dreux that he dared not let her see his joy.

He came the next day, and found Blanche not cordial, for she could not change so suddenly, but at least accessible. He talked with her and Madame Lecomte for an hour. Madeline knew how to draw her friend out, and in her presence Blanche found herself without defence. She had always spoken to her with such frankness.

"Tell me," said Monsieur de Fresnes, "how would you define happiness?"

"Happiness!" cried Madeline, "is to love your husband when he loves you."

"Very good!" assented the young Minister. "That is, indeed, an ideal perfection. And you, Madame?" he asked, turning to Blanche.

She hesitated for a moment.

"Happiness," she said, at last, "is to be able to speak and act as one chooses, without being obliged to dissimulate or lie."

"Ah!" cried Mullan, who was at a little distance, "it is easy to see, Madame, that you are not a political woman."

Everybody laughed, Guy more heartily than the others. If any one in the world suspected Blanche of understanding politics in any degree, it was certainly not her husband.

"Happiness," said Miss Amy, whose opinion had not been asked, "is to have a great deal of money, and a nice little husband."

"You agree with me, then?" said Madeline.

"Only half way," interposed the Comtesse Praxis.

Everybody spoke at once for a moment.

"And you, sir?" said Madeline to Monsieur de Fresnes. "What do you call happiness?"

"Happiness," he answered, in a low voice, and without looking at Blanche, "is to meet on this earth the perfection of all virtues, and to adore her without even telling her so, lest she should be disturbed by an avowal of such weakness."

Madeline did not understand. Blanche turned her head away with a quivering sigh. She felt a sharp sting in her heart which her conscience told her was remorse.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EQUINOCTIAL STORM.

ABOUT the end of August, a series of tempests visited the coast of Brittany, to the great damage of vessels of all kinds and to the *ennui* of the guests at the château. These persons did not like bad weather. In the hunting season, they accepted willingly enough fog and rain, and came back at night wet to the skin, but in the best of spirits if their game bags were full; but in summer, when no other amusement took the place of the agreeable life in the open air, who could preserve his serenity, show an amiable disposition and find any employment for his time?

Early on the second day of the rain, Madame Roverly received a letter which recalled her at once to Paris. This, at all events, was what she said, and no one took the trouble to institute inquiries to ascertain if she had really received a letter that day.

It was very strange. Ever since Monsieur de Grosmont had so openly manifested his prejudice against the pretty widow, she had lost half her charm in the eyes of Guy. Certain persons always get rid of their horses when their friends disapprove of them. Guy might have kept his horses, but he did not care to retain the good graces of Madame Roverly. They quarrelled constantly, and finally a pretty sharp dis-

pute with Miss Amy was followed by another, with her sister; the wind and the rain did the rest. A good carriage, tightly closed from the rain, took the two ladies to the next town, whence aided by a post-chaise and horses, they fled to more genial skies.

Monsieur de Grosmont witnessed this departure with the satisfaction of one who long since predicted the event. He warmly congratulated Monsieur de Dreux on having discovered a plausible pretext to break, without an open quarrel, relations which in his eyes were so objectionable, and he advised him to watch over Blanche that she should not be tempted to renew them when she returned to Paris. Guy assured him that this intimacy should never be resumed.

On this assurance, Monsieur de Grosmont, satisfied with having seen with his own eyes that the happiness of his ward was assured, also ordered horses and departed for Italy, where he proposed to pass the winter. He too disliked bad weather.

Gerard and Madeline were, on the contrary, in a state of intense enthusiasm. They went out early in the morning and could hardly be torn from the sea shore when night came on, and gave themselves barely time to dress for dinner. They came in thoroughly drenched, even when it was not raining, for huge waves had more than once overtaken them.

The village of Mesnil sheltered a poor population of fishermen, who in a storm pulled their boats high up on the shore, retired within their cottages, and waited until fine weather came again. Advised by

Blanche, Guy had given them a safety-boat, and also a fire engine. The latter had never been used, as no one understood the mechanism. Carefully covered with oil-cloth, the engine stood under a shed, near the Mairie, and served as a home to thousands of spiders.

The safety-boat was less neglected; its build prevented it from being used except for precisely the service for which it was intended. It could not be used for fishing nor for smuggling, the two ways in which this maritime population gained their bread. It was greatly respected, however, for it was a boat, and fishermen always respect anything which belongs to the navy. They therefore kept it in a condition which would enable them to use it in case of need.

Monsieur and Madame Lecomte were never weary of watching these stupendous waves roll up, as if about to swallow the earth, then break not far away, covering them with spray, and yet never passing the boundary marked out. There was something strange and mysterious in this, in spite of all the explanations given by science, and Gerard was quite as much interested as Madeline.

When the tempest increased in violence, when the waves mounted above the embankment which protected this poor little fishing village, and dashed in foaming jets an hundred feet in the air, or spread in luminous points like a bouquet of fireworks, the husband and wife looked at each other with a smile of ecstasy.

Five years of happiness had taught them to under-

stand each other, which is the best way of loving. In the early days of married life there is always a certain constraint between husband and wife. This restraint is born of timidity, often of distrust. These two beings, who are now bound together for life, are totally ignorant of each other's peculiarity, knowing only just what social *convenance* permits. A young girl jealously guards her innermost heart from the man she loves, as well as her thoughts and her feelings. After marriage she allows her husband to read them, and happy, indeed, is he, if he discovers the germ of virtues which his fostering care may develope. But the husband, on the contrary, is apt to shut himself up more closely than ever with his business occupations or his studies—with all the occupations implied in a solid education—with all the subjects for thought, amassed in a long experience of life. He loves his wife, and he prefers her to all other women, and yet she is not his companion, in the highest sense of the word.

Such was not the case between Madeline and Gerard; their characters, their tastes, and above all, the high idea which they both had of marriage, had attracted them to each other. They had the same thoughts, and often expressed them in the same words at the same moment. They were, therefore, never more happy than when able to pass a few hours alone together in the depths of the woods, or on the sea-shore.

"You ought to come with us," said Madeline, one night, to her friend. "You can't imagine how glorious it is——"

"I know all about it," answered Blanche, with a tinge of regret in her voice; "I spent a summer here once with my guardian and his wife. It was very delightful."

"Come with us to-morrow, then; that is, if this storm continues. Oh! I ought not to say that!" she added, a little ashamed of her selfishness.

"I will try," answered Madame de Dreux; "it is so long since I saw a storm. There are no ships in sight, I hope?"

"No, nothing but the sea and the sky. Monsieur de Fresnes, this afternoon, was as foolish as we; he could not tear himself away. A minister ought, I should think, to be weary of tempests!"

"Was Monsieur de Fresnes there?" asked Blanche, uneasily.

"Yes, on his big black horse."

"De Fresnes is very wise. He wishes to become accustomed to the fury of masses," said Mullan. "It is a most excellent parliamentary exercise."

"He would do better to come here and amuse us a little," sighed Madame Praxis. "You are none of you especially amusing, my good friends. Guy has his correspondence, the Lecomtes roam the sea-shore all the time, Mullan reads the reviews, Blanche is as silent as a tomb, the neighbors do not come because it rains. Do you know that in the last three days I have begun one hundred and eighteen times a new and complicated game of patience, which is called *la Belle Alliance*? Does that look as if I were much amused?"

"We will do better to-morrow," said Blanche, gently. "I beg your pardon, dear friend, for having neglected you. I will do so no more."

During the evening, a fisherman came to announce that there was, in all probability, a wreck off the coast, for spars had been thrown upon the shore.

"The night will be very bad," added the sailor. "Fortunately, everybody is on shore."

An idea suddenly occurred to Blanche.

"Is the life-boat in good order?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame. As soon as this bad weather came on we had it looked to."

"That was well done," said Blanche, dismissing the man with a small gift of money.

The night was terrible. The sea rolled up among the rocks with a noise like cannon, and the château trembled with the shock. The wind blew violently, and the trees in the park groaned and swayed wildly to and fro. As early as six o'clock in the morning, masters and servants were on foot after a sleepless night.

"If this lasts twenty-four hours longer," said the Comtesse Praxis, "I shall go back to Paris, and shall insist on your all going with me. There is no sense in staying in such a place when there is such weather as this. I dreamed all night of Dante's Hell."

Blanche, with her brow pressed against the glass of a window in the grand salon, looked out on the low sky and blurred horizon. Beyond the terrace, which cut off all view of the shore, she beheld the stretch of

gray and troubled waters. At this distance the waves looked like simple wrinkles, but the enormous white lines of foam which they left behind them were like the scars of monstrous wounds. All was gray; even the daylight seemed to come through glass of unequal thickness.

"It must be magnificent down on the shore," said Madeline to her friend. "Will you come?"

Without answering, Madame de Dreux clasped her hands and murmured:

"Oh! my God!"

Madeline, in deadly terror, turned and looked in the direction where the eyes of her friend were riveted.

"A ship!" she cried.

"Yes, and coming on shore," said Blanche, turning toward the others.

"Now, gentlemen, do your duty, and we, ladies, will see if we can be of service. We must try to save these men who are in such peril."

She spoke in a quick voice, raised very little more than usual, but it had a certain peremptory sharpness which every one knew was to be obeyed. In one moment the women brought out blankets, cordials and medicines—all in short, which was needed in cases of shipwreck.

These things were carried down to the village, and the people from the château, well wrapped, hurried down the avenue toward the shore.

The rain had ceased, and even at intervals a yellow light indicated that the sun was coming out.

When they left the hill which sheltered them against the west wind, they were nearly blown over by its violence. While they were still a hundred yards from the shore, they were drenched by the spray of the waves. Great flecks of yellow foam were scattered over their garments, sinister harbingers of tempests. They huddled close together, down on the shingles, where the population of Mesnil was already assembled to watch the ship, now rapidly approaching.

"What do you think?" asked Blanche, of an old sailor who had made several voyages around the world.

"Madame, I think the brig will come ashore with its crew and its cargo—it must be so. Unfortunately, the tide is going out, and the vessel will not be carried up on the beach as far as the sand."

"And then?"

"Well! then it will founder on the rocks. This is a bad place. This coast is not calculated to let a vessel come on shore; it will break to pieces."

The old sailor extinguished his pipe, which out of respect he had taken from his lips.

"Is it a French brig?" asked Guy.

"Yes, sir; don't you see the flag? You won't see it long, though."

Madeline shivered, and clung to her husband. She was afraid—her teeth chattered with emotion as much as with cold. He placed her in a somewhat sheltered corner, and stood close by her side.

"How many men should you say were on board?" asked Mullan, adjusting his glass.

"I can see nine, sir."

"Can they be saved?" gasped Blanche.

The old sailor shook his head.

"There is very little chance of it, I fear, Madame."

The spectators held their breath; the ship was not now three hundred yards from the shore, and was plunging directly upon the rocks.

Gerard's voice was now heard, ringing like a bugle call, above the frightful tumult of the wind and the sea.

"The life-boat!" he shouted. "At least we can try it, pilot, can't we?"

"We can always try, sir," answered the sailor, deferentially.

"Come on," said the young savant, running down the shore.

"Gerard!" cried Madeline, starting up. "You are not going?"

He returned to her side and reassured her with a caress.

"There is no danger, my darling!" he said, "none at all. You know that the boat is perfectly safe."

"He murmured a few words in her ear. She looked from Blanche to Guy, then turned very pale, and said no more.

"How many men?" asked Guy.

"Twelve."

"Where are they?"

"Here are ten of us, one is sick, and the other went to Manigamp last evening."

"You must have more than ten."

"Oh! we can go with that number; still, if we could have two or three more strong men, it would be better. The poor devils are in a pitiable state."

Impelled by twenty vigorous arms, the life-boat was drawn down to the edge of the sand. The ten men took their seats.

"Who will come?" cried the pilot, looking round.

No one answered. The village people felt that it was not their duty, they were not sailors.

Gerard climbed into the boat, which rocked on the waves.

"Guy, are you coming?" he shouted.

De Dreux hesitated.

"Go," said Blanche, in a low voice.

"Do you think it is necessary?" he answered, with some temper. "I shall get wet, take cold, and possibly have inflammation of the lungs."

"And these men will possibly die," answered Blanche.

"Come now, Blanche, you are not reasonable. You ask absurdities. Of course it is not the danger I mind, but I do object to a cold."

"Go," she repeated, in a tone that he felt to be unanswerable. "Gerard is going, and yet you, the Deputy, refuse! They will despise you!"

Guy made one leap into the boat, which impelled by the oars bounded through the waves. When about fifty yards from the shore, Gerard rose and waved his hat. At the same moment, Monsieur de Fresnes came

down the shore mounted on his large horse. He rode at full gallop.

"Too late!" he cried, as he stopped near Blanche. "They have gone without me!"

Blanche turned and looked at him. Admiration, gratitude, regret—shame, perhaps—were all to be read in her eyes. The Statesman received this look like a blessing, and never forgot it.

Madeline approached her friend.

"Is there any danger for them, tell me?" she said, with anguish.

"No, my love; no danger at all."

The young wife drew a long breath, as she tried to recognize Gerard among the black points in the boat, now half hidden in the waves.

Mullan had seated the Comtesse on a rock. She grasped it so tightly with her frail fingers that it hurt them, but she did not seem to know it.

"Ah! if I could but swim!" he murmured. "But I never learned."

"Ah! my friend," said the old lady, "pray stay with us. We need one of you men, in case we should chance to faint."

She pretended to jest, but her lips were pale and trembling.

The ship was now coming slowly but surely, close to the rocks. Finally an enormous wave lifted it and threw it among the granite points. A terrible crunching sound was heard above the noise made by the tempest, which went to the hearts of the spectators,

and the brig remained wedged in between two points.

The life-boat now made its way round the rock, notwithstanding the enormous waves which shook the brig and rose in masses above it. Communication was established, and one by one the shipwrecked sailors passed from the brig to the boat.

The last, who was the captain, turned, as he left the ship, toward the flag which he had not taken down. A sudden lurch and he was thrown into the water. Gerard leaned over the edge of the boat to assist him. As he did so, the boat was thrown violently against the sides of the brig; the captain disappeared. Instantly De Dreux turned and saw that Gerard was strangely still. He shook his arm, and to the inexpressible horror of the young Deputy, saw that Gerard was unconscious. A wound on the temple was—mortal.

The boat re-entered the harbor in utter silence. The shipwrecked mariners did not even express their gratitude. Guy, with his eyes fixed on his friend, asked himself what he should say to Madeline. They touched the shore, and to the questions and welcomes with which they were greeted, Guy could only say:

“An accident has taken place. We want a physician.”

Some one went without a word. It was Monsieur de Fresnes.

Madeline stood motionless, watching the boat, in which her trembling eyes failed to see her husband.

He was now lifted on to the beach. Blanche rushed forward to place herself between Madeline and the dead body of her husband; but the bereaved wife gently pushed her aside, and knelt at the side of him who only a few moments before had been to her the very essence of life, and who was now nothing.

"I knew that it would be so," she said, in a low voice. "When he bade me adieu—I was sure of it."

The funeral procession slowly took their way to the château, where the shipwrecked sailors were to find shelter.

Monsieur de Fresnes came back in two hours with a physician, but there was nothing to be done. Madeline was seated at the side of Gerard's dead body, and until the hour of the interment proffered neither a question nor a complaint.

When the young savant had received the last honors and was buried in the cemetery at Mesnil, Blanche, who dreaded a terrible explosion of grief, went to her friend who was now more than ever dear to her.

"What do you wish to do?" she asked. "Let me serve you. I have no other wish than yours."

"Let me live here," said Madeline, with a sob, the first that had been heard from her lips since that terrible moment which had made her a widow. "I can not go anywhere else. I would like to linger here with him. I love him so dearly!"

"Madeline, you shall do as you will. But is it wise?"

Her friend shook her head.

"I love him," she answered. "He is not entirely lost to me when I am here. Ah! if you did but know how I loved him!"

Blanche shuddered. It was Guy who should have been in Gerard's place. Guy, the faithless, selfish husband—the man who was incapable of lofty emotions, or of absurd self-renunciation. She shrank from this thought, which was full of the bitterest pain to her. Her love for her husband was dead—more dead even than Gerard, who was now sleeping under the autumnal flowers.

She wept for herself, and envied Madeline.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIFE AT THE CHATEAU.

ONE peculiarity of great catastrophes is that they bring closer together human beings who, in accordance with the ordinary laws of the world, would have always remained at a respectful distance from each other.

The death of Gerard Lecomte had drawn all the inhabitants of the château around the young widow, and Monsieur de Fresnes, carried away by a spontaneous movement, in which selfishness had no share, had hurried to bring to her not only consolations, but all that the most delicate pity could suggest in the way of discreet attentions.

These marks of compassion were not intended to attract the attention of Madame de Dreux; as a rule, she was not aware of them, but the respectful reserve of the minister went directly to her heart. In the isolation of life at the château, the strict laws of widowhood could not be rigorously observed; Madeleine, after the first week, spent the greater part of her time with Blanche, reappeared at the table, and even spent a portion of the evenings among her friends. This sacrifice was rewarded by the most eager and affectionate sympathy.

Lucien de Fresnes came in for an hour frequently;

Blanche could no longer be cold toward him, for between the inmates of the château and himself now existed a bond of sympathy which authorized great intimacy. But it was not to Madame de Dreux that Lucien devoted himself; it was to the young widow. Madeline liked to hear him talk of Gerard, who, in these last few weeks, had been the constant companion of Monsieur de Fresnes; they found in this a perpetual subject of conversation, while Blanche sat a little apart under the lamp; Mullan played cards with Madame Praxis, and Guy, hidden behind a newspaper, fell asleep lulled by the low murmur of voices.

Blanche was often deeply touched by this conversation, in which she took no part. When De Fresnes addressed her, as he did occasionally, it disturbed her tranquillity and awakened her from her dreams, and although her restless conscience could find no ground for self-reproach, yet Blanche felt that she was not doing wisely. But when he spoke of Gerard to Madeline, she could listen without scruples, and also without scruple admire this frank, honest and sympathetic nature, and this heart as open to pity as if it had been that of a woman.

When at the moment of departure Lucien rose, when she was compelled to give him her hand and to look him in the face, the same vague uneasiness took possession of her. And yet Lucien's eyes expressed no feeling which could disturb her. She did her best to show no consciousness of her own trouble, and to meet his gaze with eyes equally frank. She was

ashamed of herself, ashamed that she had attributed to this loyal man thoughts which, in all probability, had never occurred to him, and after reading herself severe lessons, she was able one day to raise her eyes to his.

What was her startled astonishment to detect for the first time, in the expression of her friend, a tenderness which re-awakened all her fears—respectful as was this tenderness, it was too much.

Madame de Dreux then said to herself, that the season was advancing, and that his departure from Mesnil had now become a question of days. One week, then six days, and finally, only two remained until the date fixed for the return of Monsieur de Dreux to Paris.

At the thought that their daily intercourse was coming to a close, she felt quite proud of herself that it did not cause her any sorrow. But when he was gone, Mesnil seemed to her a desert, and more lonely and depressing even than on the day of the death of Gerard Lecomte.

The guests at Mesnil decided to leave it at once. Guy did not like to hunt alone, and Mullan was too dangerous a companion, by reason of his nearsightedness, for Guy to go out with him, as there had once been an accident which had peppered the legs of a gamekeeper with duck shot, Mullan having unfortunately taken the gamekeeper for a hare in the underbrush.

Blanche finally induced Madeline to leave the

château, in order to spend some time with her own family. Therefore, one fine day, every one took flight at once, like the birds in the autumn, and Mesnil was left in gray solitude, with the sea waves breaking up almost at the foot of Gerard's tomb.

The hurry and confusion attendant upon the breaking up at Mesnil and her installation in Paris, occupied Blanche for several days. On reaching her house she had found De Fresnes's card. He left one or two more, but it so happened that on the days he called she had, in the morning, given the order that no one should be admitted. She felt a pang of regret that he should have been so near her, and yet she had missed seeing him.

Without stopping to examine her motives, she gave orders for a whole week that every one should be let in who called. She saw, consequently, a vast number of indifferent faces, but Lucien de Fresnes did not come back.

A great impatience then took possession of her. This Parisian life once more became to her, as it had been before, a desert peopled with indifferent faces. The Comtesse de Praxis lived at the other end of the town. Mullan came every day, but Mullan, since his return to town, had many thoughts which he wished to conceal. Blanche realized this, and yet knew she had no right to ask an explanation. She felt weighed down by a feeling of discouragement.

"What will become of me?" she said. "We were all so happy at Mesnil! I shall never become accus-

tomed to seeing so many people who are nothing to me!"

She devoted herself to her children. Edward needed a tutor, which, of course, was a matter of much importance; then came the winter toilette of the two children—this absorbed an entire week, after which the young mother found that she was again alone with her thoughts, and this terrible ennui, which made her dread both solitude and the world.

One day, just as she returned from a drive with her children, she perceived on the doorsteps a well-known form. The visitor was just handing to the footman his card, after writing a few words on it in pencil.

Blanche was in such haste that she opened the door of the carriage herself without waiting for the servant.

"Monsieur de Fresnes!" she said, as she hurried up the steps.

He turned quickly, and stood before her with his hat in his hand. She, all out of breath, looked at him with a smile. The babies were behind, led by their English nurse, and they, too, eagerly greeted their Mesnil friend.

"Come in," she said, recalled to reality by the pawing of the horses on the pavement. "It is a century since I saw you."

She threw back her wraps, and moved very rapidly, with an elasticity long since forgotten. Her color was heightened by emotion, and with her hair slightly blown in the wind, she looked almost like a girl again.

Monsieur de Fresnes followed her into the great salon, where two lamps were lighted. She dropped into a low chair by the fire, motioning him to a seat opposite, and then said again, almost without taking breath:

"How long it is since I saw you!"

"It has not been my fault," he answered. "I have been here three times. But you always deny yourself."

"No," she said, "my doors were open for a week, and you did not come."

"If I had only known—"

She laughed as she said:

"But you could hardly expect me to send you word."

Their eyes met. Those of Blanche expressed a childish joy.

"It is Fate," she said, gayly.

Everything looked bright to her in that brief hour.

They both began to laugh; the very atmosphere about them seemed full of youth and happiness. The dark furniture and heavy curtains, with straight, rigid folds, did not disturb them. They were like two children let loose from school.

Lucien rose from his seat after about ten minutes.

"I trust," she said, "that it will not be another twenty years before you come to see us again?"

"Is it only twenty years since I saw you?" he answered, gayly. "It seems at least forty to me!"

She smiled, and he looked at her earnestly.

"The air of Paris suits you," he said; "you look younger, brighter, than at Mesnil—you are gay——"

"Not every day," she said, and then, coloring at her imprudence, she dropped her eyes.

He had never seen her half as pretty. Suddenly he started, assailed by a new fear. Was it possible that this inaccessible woman had become interested in some one? Was it the joy of seeing some person from whom she had been separated all summer that gave her this exuberant vitality? The young man's heart contracted at this thought; was the brilliancy of this fair star to be marred?

"Have you a day this winter?" he asked, with a vague intention of seeing with his own eyes those persons who were intimate at her house.

"I begin next week—Tuesdays."

"I shall have the honor," he began.

"No, no!" she said, quickly, "they are not for you. Come at six o'clock. I am always to be seen at that hour."

Lucien was thrilled with joy. In this rashness he read so many promises. A coxcomb would have been guilty of some impertinence.

But there was no danger of anything of the kind with Monsieur de Fresnes, who saw beside that Blanche had intended no coquetry, and he had no wish to degrade his idol.

He was silent for a moment: Blanche held her breath in dread of what he was going to say, and then suddenly began to tell him some social anecdote, an

anecdote which was intended to be very amusing, but she told it in a way that rendered it positively dismal; her voice trembled; she could hardly restrain her tears; she knew that she was nervous, foolish, perhaps ridiculous. She stopped short.

"Upon my word!" she said, "I do not know why I tell you all this gossip—you do not like it any better than I do—but I suppose in the world in which we live, it does not do to be singular!"

Monsieur de Fresnes was touched by the tone in which she said this and by the tears in her eyes. He was ashamed of his own suspicions, and of the momentary jealousy he had felt of a mere chimera. A precious half hour at six o'clock he was certain now would be exclusively his own.

"I shall come often, Madame, if you will permit me," he said deferentially. I am not master of my own time here, as I was at Mesnil, but when I do not come, be certain that it is not my fault."

"You are not coming every day?" stammered Blanche, in her terror.

He understood her, and answered half sadly:

"I shall not take advantage of your permission," he said, "but it is hardly possible that I can escape from business, as often as I would like."

Mullan entered without being announced at this moment. When he saw De Fresnes, his face perceptibly clouded. The two men exchanged a few civil words. When De Fresnes departed, Mullan, who was to dine that day at the Hôtel, took a chair, but it was

not that which the Minister had occupied. He followed the direction of the eyes of his hostess, which were fixed on the arm-chair opposite.

"Dear Madame," he said, gently, "you are in a land of dreams."

She started, but her gayety had by this time returned. She answered with her pretty little laugh:

"It is a charming place, and one meets very agreeable people there. I often see you in that land."

Mullan was struck by her manner; if she were always as charming as this, there was not a heart in Paris that could resist her!

He said as much to her, and she menaced him with her finger. Guy came in at this moment.

"Mullan is making love to me," she said, to her husband. "I am glad you have come to keep him in order."

"Ah!" answered Monsieur de Dreux, "I really don't see how he can help it!"

"Is this a husband's protection?" cried Blanche, still laughing.

"I am a good watch-dog," grumbled Mullan.

With much laughter, the three friends passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIV.

STOPPING TO BREATHE.

IT sometimes seems as if Fate grew tired of hurrying us towards the end of all things, and allowed us a few moments of a repose in which we could at least realize the meaning of the words, Joy and Peace. Then the smallest circumstances bring their tribute of contentment, our friends seem to love us more than ever, our intellect seems quicker, our hearts more tender.

One of these halcyon periods now fell to the lot of Madame de Dreux. The very weather seemed determined to do its share toward brightening this season of her life.

Lovely weather, almost like spring, gave a few days' grace to the Bengal roses on the south wall of the Hôtel, and Blanche, with her children, basked in the fleeting warmth of these few days stolen from winter, almost as if they were again on the terrace at Mesnil, and there thought over the strange summer just passed away, the sweetness of which now returned to her with the odor of these dying leaves heated in the sun, that rose from her garden, and intoxicated her without her knowing it.

The soul of this woman was endowed with wings; but the disenchantments of life had caused her to fold

them very closely. Now she once more felt that she could open them and wing her flights toward all she had once loved; and which her many cares and disappointments had caused her to neglect. She read in fifteen days ten volumes of poetry—for verses were then in fashion—and found some exquisite pages which brought her both smiles and tears.

She went to the Italiéens, took a box at the Opera, enjoyed music to her heart's content, and discovered new beauties in works which she knew by heart. She bought three fine pictures, filled a portfolio with engravings, discovered a pastel of Latours and carried it off from a crowd of amateurs, paying an enormous price for it, and spent three days wrapped in admiration of her purchase, except when she was painting herself.

Her children were charming, her friends were delighted to see her, all the men of her circle admired her, for never in her life had she been so charming and so lovely. And to crown all her enjoyment, Monsieur de Dreux requiring her pardon for a new peccadillo, was more at home and extremely attentive.

Everybody, in short, was delightful, except Mullan, who was very gloomy.

He felt that this fête to which Blanche now surrendered herself, was not given in his honor, although she had never treated him with so much coquetry as at this time. He saw that she was strangely happy and that she was eager to make every one about her happy, and he, her watch-dog, felt very bitter against him who

had now taken possession of the heart of this woman whom he had himself so long loved.

"What is it to me, though?" he grumbled. "Guy will deserve what he gets, which is not always the case in such matters!"

But this philosophy did not content him. It was not for Guy's sake nor his own that he mounted guard, it was for her.

Monsieur de Fresnes came two or three times; he had not found Madame de Dreux alone on either visit. Guy made it his duty to spend a half hour before dinner with his wife. This was the occasion on which he drank in his political inspiration, and from the low chair in front of the fire in the small salon, he carried away many singular opinions which only an hour before he would have been amazed to think of. Fortunately for his brain, which could not bear an undue amount of labor, he never troubled himself to think, and found great comfort in having his opinions ready made, to produce when occasion required. Monsieur de Dreux was so unconscious of all this that he would have continued this pursuit of knowledge in the presence of Monsieur de Fresnes, if Blanche had not brought him to his senses.

Somewhat surprised at seeing a conversation, which he found especially interesting, so suddenly interrupted, he endeavored several times to carry it back again into the same path. Not being able to succeed in this effort, he grumbled in his innermost heart at the shallowness of this feminine mind which he con-

sidered too frivolous to fix itself long on anything, and finally resigned himself to wait ere he fully developed his ideas on the events of the day, for he honestly believed that it was he who was instructing his wife.

The second time that Monsieur de Fresnes called, it was he who broached the subject of politics. He spoke so much and so well that Blanche trembled lest her secret was discovered. But the air of the statesman was far from being dogmatic, and he spoke so lightly of important matters that she was soon reassured.

"These are just my ideas!" Guy exclaimed, as the Minister concluded.

Madame de Dreux began to stir the fire gently; this was a great resource on desperate occasions. One log rolled down. Monsieur de Fresnes took the tongs from the hands of his hostess, and stooped to the hearth. Guy hastened to prevent him, and all three were at the same moment within the chimney.

Blanche drew back with a nervous laugh. She felt a strange sense of discomfort at being so near these two men, although one was her husband.

Monsieur de Fresnes took his leave a few minutes later, and she did not bid him adieu with her usual gayety.

"He is a wonderfully clever man," said Monsieur de Dreux, when the door closed. "I am glad to have him for a friend. I thank you every day of my life, Blanche, for having conquered your first repug-

nance, and for admitting him to an intimacy which is, as you will agree, as flattering as it is useful."

"Yes; but we will not talk about it," answered his wife, with a weary look.

This was the last day left to Blanche of the delicious ecstasy in which she had lived for three weeks. The next morning a sharp north wind was blowing through the garden, driving the dead leaves before it, and her awakened conscience murmured reproaches which, although vague, were yet keen enough to cut deeply.

Such awakenings are cruel enough after such serenity; and Blanche, accustomed as she was to painful emotions, felt this with peculiar bitterness. She no longer laughed, and Guy complained to Mullan of having a wife who was so capricious, and who had not the smallest stability of character.

One day in the following week, about six o'clock, when Guy was detained at the Chambers by an unusually long session, the door of the salon opened, and Lucien entered without being announced. On seeing him, Blanche could not repress a start, which was as indicative of fright as of any other emotion.

"I saw no one in the ante-room," he said, in apology; "shall I retire?"

"By no means," answered Blanche, making a great effort. "My husband will be here presently, I trust."

"Don't think of that," said Monsieur de Fresnes, smiling. "I left him listening to an interminable speech; all those who did not go out before the begin-

ning, and who have had the weakness to listen, will not get their dinners until seven o'clock."

Instinctively, Blanche looked at her watch, which told her that it wanted five minutes of six.

"We shall have time for a little conversation," he said. "Oh! what a life this is; we can never see those whom we wish to see, we never do what we wish to do, we talk politics, we dine, and we are bored until suddenly, some fine day, we discover that we are old—that we shall soon die without ever having had time to be happy."

Blanche looked earnestly at this friend, who had become so dear to her. He looked worn and weary. She felt an imperious desire to console him. She would bear her own consequent sufferings later, but she would not allow him to leave without having cheered him by some kind words. She rang, and ordered dinner to be kept back, and when the servant had left the room she turned to her guest, with a tender smile on her lips and in her eyes.

"It is true," he said, in reply to this smile. "I am sad—I have enemies."

"You!" cried Blanche, in a tone of such profound amazement that Lucien began to laugh.

"Does that strike you as so extraordinary? Ah! dear Madame, when a man marks out a line of conduct and adheres to it strictly, he always has enemies. Those who have not been able to change your path, will never forgive you the uselessness of their efforts."

"And then the good that you have done them is always turned against you," Blanche said.

“Precisely, and add to these the simpletons who have asked for impossible things—the ambitious who have been disappointed, and those who think they have a right to your place—and even the most inoffensive will find that he has a comfortable amount of enemies, not one of whom he knows, and yet in all probability he has done them all a service.”

Blanche did not reply. Up to this time she had never asked herself what Monsieur de Fresnes thought of existence. She saw him handsome, rich, intelligent and powerful; she, therefore, supposed as a matter of course, that he must be happy. The faint tinge of bitterness in his present words inspired Blanche with a tender deference for this great heart suffering from some hidden wound. Her lips did not speak, but her eyes did, for he bowed deeply before her, and said in a low voice, “Thanks.”

She threw herself back in her chair, with a light shiver of apprehension. Lucien saw this fleeting expression upon this face, which he knew so well. He drew back a little, and began to talk of other things.

Blanche soon recovered herself; she was ashamed of her emotion, but she was still a little troubled and feigned a gayety she was far from feeling. It was no longer the spontaneous gayety which had rendered her so brilliant a few days before. De Fresnes saw this at once, and in his turn became very sad. He reproached himself for having disturbed the peace of this woman, who, if not happy, was at least tranquil.

He would, perhaps, have given his life to hear Blanche say that she loved him, but he would certainly have given it to spare her a remorse which would poison her whole after-life.

By degrees, a profound sadness assailed them both, and their discourse showed it. Never is so much philosophy talked as when there is darkness in the soul—happy people are content with being happy, and do not occupy themselves with causes and effects.

Monsieur de Fresnes had promised himself great pleasure in this interview, and yet, when he rose to depart, his heart was weighed down with a vague feeling that some misfortune was impending.

“And yet,” said Blanche, resuming the conversation, “you have at least the power of doing good. What does it matter what other reward you have if your conscience approves?”

“The power of which you speak,” he said, with a gentle smile, “will not long be mine. At this very moment they are attacking me in the Chamber, and very likely I am by this time condemned. A fallen Minister! Can you think of a greater nullity?”

“And you have been here quietly all this time,” cried Blanche, forgetting her previous fright.

“Yes, I came for consolation,” he answered, with a profound bow.

She was very quiet. She could not understand how this man, whose position was at that moment being attacked, could remain with her, instead of attempting to defend himself.

"It is not serious?" she said suddenly.

"It could not be more so," he answered. "You will soon see that!"

"Why do you not at once resign a position which all are endeavoring to make disagreeable to you?"

"That course has been suggested to me," he said, at last. "I have friends who esteem and love me, and it is proposed that I shall go to Vienna as ambassador."

Blanche gasped for breath, and steadied herself by the chimney.

"You will not accept then?" she asked, in a voice which sounded strangely to her own ears.

He made a little negative motion with his head. She dared not ask the motives of his refusal, but he added presently, in a low voice:

"I cannot leave Paris."

A strange dimness blurred her vision, the salon seemed to turn around, and she felt as if she were falling through space.

She seated herself, trembling from head to foot, with her eyes closed. She dared not look in the face of Monsieur de Fresnes, lest she should read in it something which should compel her to utter some irremediable word. She heard his voice, sweet and steady; nothing betrayed his consciousness of the state in which Blanche was plunged.

"One can, to be sure, Madame, live away from Paris; at least we thought so at Mesnil."

His tone calmed his companion.

"Mesnil," she said, "is far away!"

"But you will soon have a railroad. Monsieur de Dreux is bringing that project to a successful termination."

He was not jesting; he had never known of Guy's error. Blanche was the only person in the world who knew of her husband's lack of sense on the point in question. She found strength now to jest on the arrival of the first locomotive at Mesnil, where they were so entirely behind the age.

Monsieur de Fresnes was still standing. He bowed now, and took his leave.

"You will dine with us one of these days?" said Blanche, without looking at him.

"Hasten and ask me then," he answered, "for when I am dethroned I shall be too dangerous a guest, and may compromise my friends."

"The day after to-morrow, then?" said Blanche.

"Very good. Thanks."

He went away; she heard the sound of his footsteps die away. The day closed behind him, and she awoke from her dream. Three minutes only had elapsed since Lucien had said to her, "I do not wish to leave Paris," and in these three minutes she had lived a century of emotions and tortures. She sat in rigid silence, listening to the ticking of her clock. She could not think for a time.

"What am I to do? What am I to do?" she murmured, clasping her hands with a despairing gesture.

Guy's voice was heard in the ante-room. He was speaking in a louder and more peremptory tone than

usual. Blanche rose, and standing with her eyes fixed on the door, waited. Her husband entered with rather an excited air.

"Well?" she said.

"This is a nice state of things for us," he answered, in a sulky tone. "Before we become intimate with people, we ought to know——"

"If they are sure of remaining long in power?" interrupted Blanche, in an aggressive tone.

He looked at her in surprise, at his thought being so well understood.

"No, it is not that," he replied, hesitating, "but certain misfortunes never happen to any one but me."

"Indeed! Tell me what they are!" said Blanche, seating herself, after taking up a screen. She thought she was about to hear something so extraordinary that she needed some toy in her hand.

"Do you know that the Opposition has attacked de Fresnes with great violence, and I am inclined to believe that in one week he will be out of office?"

"Indeed!" said Blanche, with a tranquil air. "And what then?"

"What then! Do you think that is nothing? We have been very intimate with him, you know, all summer."

"Yes, we certainly have."

"Well, don't you see if he is put out that it will hurt me? It is really very disagreeable."

Blanche looked at her husband with a singular expression of disdain. He did not notice it.

"We are people of progress—the rest of us. I am a man of progress, and of course I can't abandon my party in a circumstance so delicate."

"Delicate is an excellent word," remarked Blanche.

"You can call it what you will," said Guy, angrily. "I am in no humor to be fastidious in my choice of words. I only know one thing, which is, that it is almost impossible for me to see De Fresnes at this time, without embroiling myself with my party. Therefore I hope he will have the sense not to appear here."

"He has just left," said Madame de Dreux, placidly.

When Lucien was not there she was brave, and felt herself capable of holding her own against an army.

"Ah!" said Guy, quite stupefied. "And——"

"And I invited him to dinner to-morrow."

"Now was there ever anything so unfortunate!" cried Monsieur de Dreux, striking his hand forcibly on the table near which he stood. "Then you must find some way of cancelling the invitation. You must attend to that at once."

Blanche rose slowly, and went up to her husband.

"I will never do that," she said calmly.

He looked at her in some astonishment. The steel of which his wife was made was usually so wrapped in silk, that although he may have had some vague suspicion of her powers of resistance, it was a mere lightning flash of inspiration speedily forgotten.

"Why?" answered Monsieur de Dreux, considerably disturbed by the firm, cold gaze fixed by his wife upon him.

"Because it would be"—she hesitated for a word, not caring to use the one which leaped to her lips—"it would be an indelicacy."

She smiled bitterly, as she spoke.

"You have been proud and happy," she continued, "in the friendship of this man when he was powerful. What would be thought of you, were you to abandon him on the eve of his disgrace?"

"But my duties toward my party," began Guy.

Blanche turned the screen in her hands two or three times, and then threw it across the room.

"Listen to me," she said, in a low, hurried voice. "You know that I now rarely give you advice, but to-day you must listen to me and believe me. Monsieur de Fresnes is no ordinary man. I do not know what his enemies say of him to-day, but I do know the fiat of history—yes, Guy, of history. When we are all dead and forgotten, the world will know from historians the nature of this man. They will know that he loved his country better than himself, and truth absolute and unqualified better than all. In fifty years it will be an honor to have been the friend of this man."

"In fifty years," repeated Guy, piteously, "Ah! my dear, that is too far off!"

Blanche shrugged her shoulders.

"In two years, then, at most; those who have to-day attacked him because he is so much wiser than they, and is determined to avoid those trammels and engagements from which a Ministerial party finds it so

difficult to release itself—these very men, I say, will eagerly implore him to leave his retreat—in all probability, to repair their blunders.

“Monsieur de Fresnes is one of those Ministers who are called to power every time a party seems lost, because his own personal reputation is in itself a guarantee of honor and security.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I know it. And you, of course, realize that those who have had sense enough to remain friends of Monsieur de Fresnes, even at the price of momentary disfavor, will be the men who will wield the power of the future. I say this for your own sake, Guy; you are ambitious; would you not be proud to remain the friend of a man to whom Posterity will give so glorious a name in the history of his country?”

Guy cared little for History and Posterity; but he was fond of Ministers, because, being in their shadow, was to obtain more easily favors for his dear and insatiable electors, who looked on a Deputy as a sort of errand-boy to be employed when they needed his services.

“Do as you choose,” said Blanche, at last, her courage and energy suddenly deserting her. “After all, I care very little.”

Guy reflected a moment.

“This,” he said, in an important tone, “is, in my opinion, the wisest course for us to pursue. You have invited Monsieur de Fresnes; we shall have him to dine with us day after to-morrow—but with no other

guests than the Comtesse Praxis and Mullan. In that way the interview will be entirely of a private nature and with no official character."

"Good Heavens!" cried Blanche, in a tone of utter disgust. "Do as you choose, I don't care!"

In fact, at this moment she was so utterly weary of the contest that she could not, had her life depended on it, say one other word.

CHAPTER XV.

THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

AFTER dinner, Guy took flight toward the places which that evening he proposed to favor with his presence. Blanche announced her intention of remaining at home, and retreated to her small salon with a pile of new books and three pieces of embroidery—each more interesting than the other.

She turned over the leaves of her books, took two or three stitches on her needle-work, and then rang for the carriage to be brought round. The great silent house, with the sleeping children and her servants off at such a distance, seemed to her too inexpressibly sad to be longer borne.

The drive from her Hôtel to that of the Comtesse Praxis, while arousing the physical energy of Blanche, awakened her torpid soul at the same time. One unfortunate thought haunted her with the regularity of a pendulum; Monsieur de Fresnes was, in her eyes, insulted by the manner in which Guy proposed to receive him the next day.

In vain did Madame de Dreux seek to dismiss this idea; she could not drive it away, except for a moment, and then it would return with the persistency which is common to disagreeable things.

Blanche had given to Monsieur de Fresnes such an

elevated position in her esteem, that the thought of seeing her friend merely tolerated by Guy, when she herself considered a visit from him as the greatest possible honor, made her feel bitterly angry. She could not re-make the nature of her husband; she could not wreak her wrath on him; on whom or what then?

On her delicate handkerchief, perhaps, which she twisted and turned in her fingers until it was torn in bits.

She felt herself humiliated—humiliated for him, this man whose serenity was undisturbed by all this base ingratitude. He, of course, would never know of it, but it was a little too much, she thought, that a man of the second-rate abilities of Monsieur de Dreux should have it in his power to take from her the joy dear to every generous heart, of consoling those who fall in the battles of life. She felt that her house should now be at his service, more even than when he was victorious; that he should be more esteemed and beloved than when he was triumphant. Her anger increased every moment. She entered the house of her friend—almost ran up the stairs, and appeared in the salon with her head held well back, a bright color in her cheeks and her eyes flashing haughtily. It was almost as if she panted to find some one to whom she could say what she could not say to her husband.

“You! Dear Invisible!” cried the Comtesse, dropping her cards. “You come to solace my loneliness. It is very nice of you, for it is long since you were here.”

"Possibly, because I invariably find Mullan established in your chimney corner," answered Madame de Dreux, with an odd sort of glance at that gentleman.

"Many thanks," he said rising to his feet, and bowing gravely. "How ought I to take these words? evidently as a declaration, but of war or of—"

"Neither the one or the other," answered Blanche, seating herself. "It is simply a declaration of independence!"

"You are very naughty to-night," said Mullan, leaning toward her. "You have been annoyed, have you not?"

Madame de Dreux did not reply. She was, in fact, a little ashamed of speaking as she had done to this kind and devoted friend who had served her so faithfully. She smiled, and this smile effaced the memory of her belligerent words.

"I came to invite you both," she said, "to dine with us, the day after to-morrow, to meet Monsieur de Fresnes."

"A protest?" said Madame Praxis, lifting her eyebrows until they were nearly lost under her beautiful white hair.

"If you choose to regard it as such!"

Blanche uttered this brief sentence in the most aggressive way.

Mullan leaned forward a little, and looked at her through half-closed lids.

Madame de Dreux passed her torn handkerchief.

over her lips. Mullan instantly saw the rents in the linen cambric.

"I consider that very brave," said Madame Praxis. "I respect Guy for that, though in his place I should have done the same. It is a good thing to know how to defend one's friends when they are attacked—"

"Unjustly, you mean," observed Mullan.

"And even justly!" cried the Dowager; "I am inclined to believe that it is when they are justly attacked that they stand all the more in need of being upheld."

"And you who say this," cried Mullan, "are always abusing me, and saying that I like paradox."

Blanche laughed, a nervous sort of laugh, which went out like a spent fire-rocket.

"Admit, Blanche, that your husband has done well. I shall tell him so, you may be sure of that! and I shall wear my very best gown to your dinner, my dear."

"No," said Blanche, hesitating, "do not do that; there will be no one but ourselves and Monsieur de Fresnes. In spite of our intention of making it a sort of protest, we, for many reasons, consider this best."

The Comtesse lifted her eyebrows once more.

"Only five persons then?" she said. "But it seems to me at a time like this——"

Blanche did not leave her time to conclude her sentence.

"My husband," she said, hastily, "is too much indebted to the Minister, not to be anxious to give him

privately the most positive marks of esteem and devotion. But, my dear friend, do you think it would be advisable to draw down on us the wrath of those persons who have usurped his power?"

"Ah! Blanche, you have not the courage of your opinions," cried Madame Praxis.

Mullan, who was watching Blanche from under his half-shut lids, was absolutely terrified by the strange bitterness which flashed into her face at these words.

The situation struck him as a most critical one, and in order to make closer observations, he rose from the cushioned depths of the chair in which he was so luxuriously established.

"After all," said Madame de Dreux, slowly, "it is not by any means certain that Monsieur de Fresnes will be conquered in this struggle. He has not made his speech yet."

"Ah! my child, you know little of life. Are not honest men invariably thrown out of office, sooner or later!"

"Some defeats are victories," answered Blanche.

"Yes, of course. And if you are determined to believe that he will be victorious, I certainly will not deprive you of this conviction. Poor dear de Fresnes! They will never find such another man. Shall we have a game of cards? Whist with a dummy?"

"I should much prefer a cup of tea," answered Blanche, as she went toward the tray just then brought in.

Mullan rose, and took two or three turns about the

room, finally taking his stand where he could see Blanche very plainly and watch every fleeting expression on her face, which once so mobile, was now, as a rule, set and firm.

"What is going on in Paris?" she said, as she poured out the tea. "I have been out all day, but my trades-people are not instructive."

"There is plenty of gossip," answered Mullan.

"Interesting gossip?"

"By no means; but some of it is rather instructive."

"Mullan!" said the Comtesse, severely, "when you are alone with me I allow you to forget the respect you ought to feel for my aged ears, but you must respect those of my young friends."

"Madame de Dreux does not doubt my respect," said Mullan, in a meaning tone.

Blanche colored deeply. She was never quite sure how much he suspected.

"There are three stories just now which are especially interesting," continued Mullan, settling himself once more in his chair. "The first one is about horses."

"We will omit that!" said Blanche, disdainfully.

"Ah! you do not care for horses then? You astonish me!" answered Mullan, in a tragic tone. "Can it be possible that there is any one who does not like horses. However, I will proceed. The second is a love story."

"Lawful love?" asked the Comtesse.

"Yes and no: it was lawful on the part of the

husband, who loved his wife, and it was unlawful on the part of the wife——”

“Who did not love her husband?”

“Ah! it is not unlawful not to love her husband,” answered Mullan, with an easy good-natured air, “but she loves another than he, without knowing it too.”

“Come now, Mullan, no romancing,” said the Comtesse; “go on with your story. It is ridiculous for you to say that a woman can love a man without knowing it. It is impossible!”

“Not always; sometimes one does not wish to know it. But this lady was enlightened as to her true sentiments.”

“Well?” said Blanche, a little pale, and with a strange feeling at her heart.

“Well! she has gone, leaving a child worse than orphaned, a husband who is a widower, and worse than a widower.”

“She is a wretch, at all events,” said the Comtesse, with considerable animation. “Who is it?”

“The newspapers give the initials; they are respectable trades people,” answered Mullan. “But she was an honest creature,” he added, with a certain melancholy sweetness in his voice. “As long as she did not know, she resisted, but when she understood the truth she was ashamed to lie. She was not willing to blush before her husband and child. In my opinion, she is much to be pitied.”

“Pitied indeed!” murmured Madame Praxis. “It seems to me that these are most singular ideas to advance. I don’t understand them!”

A moment later Blanche rose to leave, refusing obstinately to allow Mullan to go with her. She wished to be alone with her own thoughts.

"No, I do not love him," she exclaimed, when the carriage left her friend's door, and she found herself alone between its cushioned walls.

"Love him! No! I have loved my husband, but that love in no degree resembled the tender friendship which I do most assuredly feel for Monsieur de Fresnes.

I have made one terrible mistake in my life, and I do not propose to make another, if I can avoid it."

Blanche entered her own house with a stronger conviction, than ever before in her life, that she should never be tempted to forget her own womanly dignity. She passed through her deserted rooms, with the air of a queen, and reached her own room perfectly serene in appearance, but in reality very nervous and feverish.

Seated in the chimney corner was Guy, reading.

"Guy!" she said, in a tone of affright. All her dignity, all her composure fled at the sight of this apparition. What was he doing there? For more than six months he had not crossed that threshold. And what caprice had induced him to penetrate this room, which she had come to consider an asylum.

"By your tone, my dear," answered her husband, with a smile, "I can see that you are annoyed. Reassure yourself, my visit shall be short. I came to speak to you of that dinner."

"What, again?" answered Blanche, with a frown.

"I am sorry to say yes," he replied.

Blanche seated herself with an air of excessive weariness. Guy rose, as he could always speak, he thought, to better effect, leaning against the chimney.

"I heard to-night that De Fresnes is to speak to-morrow."

"Ah!"

Blanche felt her heart give a sudden leap, but her face was unmoved. She had always eagerly desired to hear the young minister make a speech, and now she might possibly hear him on the day of his defeat.

"It is possible that this speech may save him, you know," continued Guy, "and it may also render his fall only more conspicuous. This unhappy dinner perplexes me. Is there no way——"

"I have just invited Mullan and the Comtesse Praxis," said Blanche, coldly.

"It is a great pity!" murmured Guy, still hesitating. "I had thought that a little indisposition——"

"Your own?" asked Blanche, carelessly.

"No; yours, my dear. A man has no right to be indisposed."

"And I am perfectly well!"

Her husband looked at her. A vague suspicion that she was mocking him suddenly came to his mind.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It will be time to be taken ill after the speech," she said. "In order not to risk a brief unpopularity, you wanted me to retract my invitation to Monsieur de Fresnes? Suppose I had done so, and Monsieur de Fresnes were more popular next month than he is

to-day. Would you have the audacity in that case to invite him again to your house?"

"Of course I should!" cried Guy, with considerable warmth. "I should not be a politician, if I could not do that!"

"Very good," answered Blanche, dryly. "I fortunately know nothing of politics. However, if you take my advice, you will allow me to remain in excellent health until to-morrow evening."

"So be it then!" answered Guy, enchanted to give his real submission the appearance of a great concession. He said good-night, and she escorted him to the door with the greatest possible politeness, and when he had gone she slipped a delightful little bolt which secured her against surprises; then she returned to her fire. The whole room now displeased her; it seemed to her at that moment as utterly commonplace as if it had been a room in an inn.

George was gone; she heard the wheels on the gravel paths under her window. It was not midnight—there are many houses in Paris where people amuse themselves after midnight. Blanche drew a long, heavy sigh, but this was a habit with her. In reality, she was at this moment much delighted.

"To-morrow, to-morrow is the great battle!" she said, as she dropped asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

APPROVAL.

THE next day, Madame de Dreux ordered the carriage at an early hour; after breakfasting with her children, she went out with them about half-past one. She had taken the resolution to spend this day out of doors, deep in business. In two hours she did wonders, and drove all over Paris.

When four o'clock struck at the Palais Bourbon, it so happened, by a singular coincidence, that the great family carriage turned into the Place-de-la-Concorde from La Rue Royale. Madame de Dreux had still a milliner to visit, a picture to see at an artist's studio, a dress to try on, and a half-dozen other things to do. She detested the daily drive on the Champs Elysées, which the children so heartily enjoyed. Suddenly she had an idea, and she pulled the check-string.

"To the Palais Bourbon," she said, "You will leave me there, and take the children to the Hôtel, and then return here for me."

Two minutes later the majestic equipage rolled away, and Blanche was within the dark passage.

"It is very full, Madame," said the old huissier, respectfully, instantly recognizing her, for he had seen her many times. "I have no good seat to offer you, I fear."

"That does not matter," said Blanche, as she drew her veil over her face. "I do not care to see, if I can only hear who is speaking."

"The Minister has just begun. Ah! Madame, what eloquence!"

Blanche was seated at last on a tabouret in a dark corner. Around her was a crowd of provincials stretching out their necks with an eager air. She leaned against the wall and listened attentively.

The voice of her friend, Monsieur de Fresnes, this voicé which was so soft and sweet in a room, acquired in public the rich sonority of certain copper-throated instruments beautifully managed by artists.

Not noisy, not loud, but rich and full, making itself heard in every corner of the chamber. His very voice was charming, and the words were worthy of so wonderful an instrument.

Honor and Right, the consciousness of a duty fulfilled, pride at never having yielded to corruption or violence—all that which exalts and fills the heart of a political man when he loves his country, and places that interest above his personal glory—all those sentiments in short, which stir the hearts of Frenchmen—palpitated and vibrated in the discourse of the Minister.

Blanche listened in absolute ecstasy, with her hands loosely folded on her knees and with closed eyes. The people about her turned several times to look at this motionless woman who seemed to be asleep, and then they forgot her.

She looked at the orator, and from time to time a

dull murmur, a sound of voices, made her tremble with sympathy.

She was certain by this time that Monsieur de Fresnes had rapidly regained the ground he had lost. Two or three rounds of applause interrupted him.

"Hush! Hush!" was the cry from all parts of the house.

The audience were determined to lose nothing of these dignified sentences; the faces of all showed the most earnest attention, and those good sentiments which lie dormant within all of us, were awakened by this discourse.

"And now," said Monsieur de Fresnes, in a voice as clear and fresh as a bugle, "let the country choose between those who have told them the truth and those by whom they have been deceived; between those who have honored their native land and those who traffic in its necessities. I, for one, shall return to private life with unstained brow and pure hands, proud that I have had it in my power to save France!"

There was an enthusiastic outburst which ran up and down the benches. The votes were taken amid this tumult, but Blanche had gone. Pulling her veil over her face, which was bathed in tears, she fled like a criminal, and just as the applause came she entered her carriage.

When she reached home she went at once to her room, where, with her hands pressed tight upon her heart, she walked up and down for an hour. She had no consciousness of either the Past or the Present.

Lucien's voice still vibrated in her ears and echoed through her heart. She repeated over and over again certain phrases and certain reflections, which were to her like delicious music. The noises in the house by degrees recalled her to her senses. She seated herself at her desk, took out her cards of invitation, and aided by her address book, wrote fifty names chosen from among the most brilliant persons in Paris. Ten other notes were sent for the dinner. Guy coming back in an hour's time, found her still occupied with this business.

"You are writing?" he said. "I think it would be well to invite some people for to-morrow. De Fresnes has had one of those stupendous successes which we do not see once in ten years. Let us take advantage of the circumstance."

"It is done," said Madame de Dreux, as she wrote the last address. "I was at the Chamber."

"You are a wonderful woman!" answered her husband. "Upon my word, I am sometimes tempted to believe that you have genius."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OVATION.

THE next evening the grand salons in the Hôtel de Dreux, splendidly illuminated, were thrown open for the first time that winter. And Monsieur de Fresnes had through Blanche, an ovation which by reason of the people assembled, completed the success of the previous evening.

Madame de Dreux, dressed in dark red velvet, looked like a Venetian portrait, and moved about in the plenitude of her joy and her beauty, like a goddess among the Olympian clouds.

She closed her eyes to everything but the Present—determined to see nothing. Prouder than a wife, tenderer than a sister, she felt this triumph with the thorough enjoyment of a generous soul. She said as much to herself, eager to conceal all that lay underneath the surface.

Monsieur de Fresnes did not exchange ten words with Blanche. They produced the effect of actors in some magnificent part played before this crowd of the *élite*.

During dinner, though they sat side by side, they were separated by the formal ceremony of state dinners, and said only a few words, smiled and nodded, as if they had studied their parts.

Blanche had done much the same the day of her marriage, during that interminable wedding breakfast. This time the feeling was much deeper and more emphatic.

About eleven o'clock that evening, when the rooms were rapidly filling, Lucien found himself in a corner with Blanche, somewhat apart from the crowd. It was of course only natural that the Minister should pay some marked attention to the mistress of the house.

"You ought to be very happy," said Blanche, looking at him with her violet eyes full of friendly sweetness.

"And I am," he answered, "but it is because I realize the friend you are to me. If you only knew how near was my disgrace! A thread spun by a spider was a rope, compared to that which held the sword of Damocles over my head. The King said as much to me this morning, and added—'You will not be able to keep your portfolio long, my poor De Fresnes, but keep it as long as possible, I beg of you.'"

"Does not the King believe in the duration of your ministry?" asked Blanche, in great surprise.

"He and I both know perfectly well that I hold my position for not more than two weeks longer." But he continued, as he dropped his voice: "That which I prize above everything, and which will make me ever grateful to the capricious public, is the sympathy and affection which you have shown me. The

thought that I count for something in your life—while you are all in mine—”

He spoke almost in a whisper. She heard him, however, far better than the day before at the Palace Bourbon. She listened with eyes cast down. Around her quivering lips was an expression almost of suffering.

“All that a woman may be—the incarnation of all my dreams, all that is noble and pure—I see in you. Yesterday, when I was speaking, I thought of you and said to myself that if I triumphed you would be pleased. I saw you, though you were far away.”

“I was there,” said Blanche.

He did not speak, but his eyes were more eloquent than his lips. She met his look and replied with a faint smile. Fifty pair of eyes might possibly be on them at that moment.

“When shall I see you?” he asked, as he rose.

“To-morrow, at five o’clock,” she answered, in a calm voice.

Five minutes later, he left the room.

When the last guests had gone, Blanche went to her own room. Guy followed her, talking of one thing and another. When she reached the threshold, she turned to say good-night.

“You are wonderfully beautiful, dear Blanche,” he said, affectionately. “Are there not a thousand things for us to talk over to-night?”

“I am so horribly tired,” she answered. “Breakfast with me to-morrow, and we will talk as much as you wish.”

"Good-night then," he said; somewhat piqued.

He leaned over to kiss her. She drew back and the kiss remained on her hair.

Blanche speedily dismissed her maid, and when she was alone she shivered from head to foot at the thought of the conjugal kiss she had just escaped.

"And yet he is my husband," she thought, with a feeling of intense horror.

The truth suddenly appeared before her like a hideous phantom—enormous and monstrous. She shrank back from that frightful vision.

"He will come to-morrow!" she said. "I have given him a rendezvous."

Nothing had previously opened her eyes; not Mullan's warning nor her own pride, formerly so tenacious. She had permitted Lucien to make a declaration, to ask a rendezvous; and yet, to open her eyes it had been necessary that her husband—

She hid her face, trying to fly this thought and deny to herself this truth. Her efforts were useless. Now that her eyes were opened, she could see the whole disastrous truth. The fall to her pride was a bitter one. Comparing herself to her husband, she had acquired a strong conviction of her own superiority. She was proud because she knew that in her life and on her conscience was neither spot nor blemish. It is hard to acknowledge that one has fallen.

Meanwhile this loyal soul could not long deliberate before her duty. In the morning she appeared pale and with dark circles under her eyes, a very different

looking creature from the triumphant woman of the night before. Saying that she was too much fatigued to see any one, she gave orders that nobody should be admitted until five o'clock, and then every one. On the stroke of five, Monsieur de Fresnes appeared. He was received by Blanche standing, and with all the marked respect due to his position. He was about to express his astonishment, but she checked him.

"You told me, yesterday," she began, without any preamble, "that neither the King nor yourself were certain of the duration of your power, did you not?"

"Yes, Madame," he answered, surprised by so simple a remark.

"I have heard you spoken of," she continued, "in connection with Vienna, and it seems to me, sir, that you ought to take advantage of the present difficulties of your position, to send in your resignation and hasten to Vienna."

"Hasten to Vienna," repeated De Fresnes, with a thrill of pain in his voice. "Have I displeased you, then?"

Blanche hesitated. It was very cruel to seem hostile to this man whom she loved with all her heart. She had not the necessary courage.

"No," she said, bravely, "you have not displeased me. But you ought to go away, sir; honor and duty demand it. You owe it to yourself to do this. There are some resolutions which are very hard to decide upon, but they are often the best. Some persons may keep for a long time on the edge of the abyss without

ever falling in, while others not only fall, but die of the fall. Go to Vienna, sir. I assure you that you ought to go to Vienna."

He looked earnestly in her face. Great compassion filled his heart. It was with difficulty that she restrained her tears. Her hollow eyes, her trembling lips, touched him profoundly, for she was evidently suffering. He still hesitated. He loved her very dearly. She had slowly taken possession of his whole being in the last six months; she had become the dominant thought of his life. It was necessary now to leave her, and renounce a chimerical hope of happiness, and that at the moment when she loved him, and because she loved him.

"Go to Vienna," repeated Blanche, turning very pale.

Her strength deserted her.

"You insist on it!" he said, bitterly.

"I implore you to go," she answered, in a low voice, as she sank into the depths of an arm-chair.

He looked at her for a moment, then bowed over the hand that rested on the arm of her chair.

"To be revered," he said in a low voice, "always to be loved—always to be lamented. I love you so much that I obey you. I will not cause you to shed one tear. Be happy, fair saint."

"Happy!" she murmured, sadly.

"Be at peace then. Ah! it matters little to what distance you exile me—I shall still adore you."

A step was heard in the next room.

"Adieu," he said, pressing his lips passionately on the hand of Madame de Dreux.

"Adieu," she murmured, in reply.

The footman appeared with a card.

"Too late," she said, without looking at it. "I receive no more to-day."

The Minister's carriage drove away. Blanche fled to her room, and was not seen for two days.

A week later, to the astonishment of every one, Monsieur de Fresnes was made Minister to Vienna. Probably his diplomatic duties allowed no delay, for he went off without having had time to take leave of any one.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPRING IN THE COUNTRY.

NEVER had the woods at Mesnil been so beautiful as in the spring of the year which followed the departure of Monsieur de Fresnes. Before May they were full of nests and merry, twittering birds. Madeline, who went there early in April, wrote to Madame de Dreux, in the hope of inducing her to hasten her departure from Paris.

Blanche asked nothing better. The session was over; her husband could now speak to his friends without running the risk of compromising himself, for all he said was invested with a certain dignity, and looked upon as mere words with which he, skilful politician as he was, chose to disguise his thoughts and opinions. Guy's reputation was now so thoroughly established, that he must have been guilty of the most unparalleled and repeated follies ere it could have been shaken.

When a reputation is once made—it matters not of what kind—it defies all attacks, even those of time, and under its shelter one may, with impunity, do things which in another person would be most promptly and vehemently blamed.

Guy's position, on the occasion of the attack on De Fresnes, had won for him great applause. The

King, Louis Philippe, had expressed in public his approval of the courage shown by this young Deputy, who had not been afraid to openly espouse the cause of his favorite Minister.

After this, Guy believed that he might achieve anything he pleased, and he was not far wrong. At this epoch a little Don Quixotism was not amiss in politics, while at the same time the more practical qualities of Sancho Panza were duly appreciated.

When consulted in regard to leaving town for Mesnil, Guy made some objections, and finally ended by saying that he regarded Mesnil, except in the hunting season, as an absolute desert, and that he should go there with reluctance.

"Nevertheless, my dear, if you insist," he added, with the exquisite grace which was one of his greatest charms.

Personally, Blanche did not insist, but Guy's constituents were somewhat more exacting.

On this point, Monsieur had an idea; in fact, we may say, that he had two, which, under the circumstances, was a wonderful thing. The first was, that as the elections did not take place until the following year, it would be entirely useless to put himself to any inconvenience at present. The second was, that Blanche, with her charitable impulses and habits, would be an excellent missionary and agent among the dwellings of the peasant.

"But," said Guy, for he had a very clear perception of what was expected of him, "you must be sure and

ask a Mayor or two to dinner, from time to time, and when you find it not too impossible, ask their wives also."

"What do you call too impossible?" inquired Blanche, determined to make her husband express himself in words.

"Well," answered Monsieur de Dreux, hesitating a little, "if she eats with a pointed knife which she takes from her pocket, I should call her impossible; but if she understands the use of a knife, you might ask her."

Blanche laughed, and promised to be guided by this rule, and one fine morning in May the family at the Hôtel de Dreux entered two berlins,—children, tutor and governess,—and drove away in a soft rain, which promised well for the violets and lilies of the valley at Mesnil.

"How you are changed!"

This exclamation escaped from the lips of Madame Lecomte, the moment that the foot of her friend touched the steps at Mesnil.

With their arms around each other, Blanche and Madeline passed through the wide vestibule and entered the salon, which Madame Lecomte had filled with flowers.

Blanche looked around her—this place was full of memories, both bitter and sweet, and turning away her face, burst into tears.

Madeline wept also, but her tears were easily accounted for, and she made no mystery of her grief.

Blanche, on the contrary, was obliged to conceal her sorrow; she tried to smile, said she was nervous and overdone by her journey, and moving about the room, endeavored to give it its usual air by changing the places of the chairs and ornaments.

"You are not ill?" asked Madame Lecomte, forgetting her own grief in the presence of the trouble of her friend, a trouble which must be serious enough to leave such evident traces on the fair face of Blanche.

"Not now—do not ask me now," said Blanche, with a gesture which seemed to ask for peace and silence.

Days passed, however, and Blanche made no confidence to her friend, who asked her no questions. Madeline knew, however, that there could never be any secret between them, and that a day would come when Blanche would open her heart, she felt very sure.

The glory of the white hawthorne, which surrounds a Brittany spring like a halo, was in all its fullness, when Madame de Dreux, for the first time, determined on a drive beyond the grounds of the château. One day, after breakfast, she ordered to be brought round a small English carriage, which her husband used when he wished to see those of his constituents who lived in somewhat inaccessible quarters, and taking the reins in her own hands she started off with her friend upon an excursion, which was very like a pilgrimage.

She avoided the coast, which was always a most painful sight for Madeline, and turning into a lovely road, winding through the valley, she soon found her-

self in the woods, still wet from the rain of the previous night, and full of the delicious odor of all growing things. The English pony was allowed to go as he would, and under the green trees, through whose young leaves flickered the yellow sunlight, the hearts of the two women opened to each other.

"Have you begun to endure life again?" asked Blanche, without looking at the young widow. The question she felt to be too much; she dared not look at her friend.

"Yes," answered Madeline, in so steady a tone that Madame de Dreux ventured to turn toward her. "Life is not intolerable to me. I have brought all Gerard's papers here, and thanks to his written notes and still more to the long conversations we used to hold during all the years we lived together, I believe that I may yet find happiness; that a great joy is in store for me."

Her voice was calm, and in it was a ring of absolute content.

Blanche, in great surprise, turned and looked at her with keen attention. In those soft eyes, weary with tears, there was indeed a look of content. What possible joy could there be in store for the heart of the widow.

"I have acquired the certainty," she continued, "that after putting in order all the documents prepared by Gerard, on a certain subject, under the light of his instructions, I may venture to publish a book made up of these documents and notes. Afterward there

will be possibly another volume. In this way his dearest dream, that of being useful, will be realized."

"And," she continued, with her eyes fixed on the varying shades of green among the forest trees, "I am thankful every day for the love of my dear husband, who treated me always like a friend and enlightened my ignorance by talking familiarly with me—making another self of me, so that now I am enabled to complete his self-appointed task, and rescue his name from oblivion."

Blanche did not reply. Madeline, in her turn, now studied the face of her companion.

"You are weeping?" she said.

In fact, tears were dropping fast on the gloved hands of Madame de Dreux. She did not turn away her face, and made no attempt to conceal her emotion.

"I envy you," she said. "What would I not give to have, like yourself, such a precious duty,—that of preserving the memory of some beloved one from oblivion!"

Madeline said not one word. She had long since taken an accurate measure of Guy's real value.

Blanche gathered up the reins and lightly touched the half-asleep horse with her whip.

Presently the trees became less crowded, and after a little, glimpses of a village were obtained. Blanche, however, turned to the left before the village was reached, and soon passed a house built in the style once so common in Brittany; it was of gray stone, surrounded by high walls, with a court-yard planted with trees.

"What is this place?" asked Madeline.

"It is the one which belongs to Monsieur de Fresnes," answered Blanche, with difficulty pronouncing the name which now for the first time since her return to Mesnil passed her lips.

As they drove past the court-yard they saw a man washing a carriage. Blanche took little heed of this, as carriages may be washed in the absence of their owners, and soon the house was left far behind them.

The shadow of the trees was now very grateful, as the sun was getting higher, and the wheels rolled noiselessly along and the friends were silent. Presently they heard at a distance the measured gallop of a horse. Blanche lifted her head as if she scented danger in the air. She touched her horse with the whip, and the docile animal quickened his pace. The road made a sharp turn, and from behind a clump of chestnuts appeared the black head of a horse. Blanche knew the horse, and presently recognized the cavalier.

"Monsieur de Fresnes!" exclaimed Madeline, in amazement, "I thought he was in Austria."

Blanche did not speak. She bent forward to return his respectful salutation with her eyes cast down, for she did not dare lift them to meet his own.

After the horse and his rider had passed, and all was again quiet along the road, Madeline looked at her friend, and the questions which rose to her lips were frozen there.

"Madeline," said Blanche, in a low voice, as they returned to Mesnil, "I am very unhappy—more unhappy by far than yourself."

CHAPTER XIX.

ROCKS AHEAD!

AFTER a sleepless night, Madame de Dreux rose early; Madeline was still asleep; the two friends had sat up very late the evening before; they did not talk to each other, and yet they felt that they must be together.

The children were awake and chattering in their nursery. The unusually early visit from their mother caused them to utter little shrieks of joy, and startled the servants, who thought they had been guilty of some negligence which merited reproof. This duty accomplished, Blanche went down into the garden.

The air was delicious, the sea was blue with silvery specks of foam here and there. Light fleecy clouds flitted over the sky. The light-house—how many times during that long winter had Blanche thought of the light-house!—the light-house shining in the sun, stood on its rock like a column of rose-tinted alabaster. Sea birds flew over the beach, and sparrows twittered merrily about the eaves of the château.

An exuberance of life, of spring, emanated from every growing thing—from the leaves and the meadows, from the very air, which was full of white butterflies that looked like winged flowers. Blanche left the garden. She felt a strong desire to weep in the

presence of all this youth and freshness. She returned to the house, and going through the salon went out on the terrace. From there she saw no trees, no verdure, only immensity of space—a long stretch of beach and the wide open sea.

The terrace offered new dangers. Blanche went at once to the place where she had sat the preceding year, when for the first time she had yielded to the entreaties of her husband, and invited Monsieur de Fresnes to dinner.

So much the worse for those who had urged her to a step to which she had consented with so much reluctance. If she suffered at present, if her heart were slowly breaking, if she felt that life had no interest for her unless she could make up her mind to close her eyes to her duties, it at least was in no degree her fault.

Had she not objected again and again? Had she not been alternately urged and blamed? Had not Monsieur de Dreux himself said, in this very spot, that her unreasonable prejudice against the Minister would be the ruin of his own personal hopes?

"They did it themselves," said Blanche, bitterly. "They could not see that this man was as far above them all as the sun itself, and that if I saw him I should love him, and that if I admitted him to the intimacy of my home, that I should be utterly without defence!"

A hand was laid lightly and tenderly on the shoulder of this despairing woman. She turned quickly. It was Madeline.

"Yes," said the young widow, answering the gaze which was fixed upon her, and suddenly divining all that was passing in this unhappy soul. "Yes," said the young widow, "yes, they seem to you to have sought your ruin, Blanche, but remember, they did it unconsciously."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Madame de Dreux, looking her friend intently in the eyes. "Are you sure of what you say? Were they all blind?"

"I swear it!" answered Madeline, lifting her hand to the Eternal sky, calling upon it to witness her oath.

"Who told you so?" said Blanche in some irritation.

"Gerard. The very evening before his death, we were talking of you and also of another. Gerard had divined all of which you were then ignorant, my dear and noble friend, and while he deplored the blind obstinacy of your husband, he spoke of your pushing your loyalty almost to absurdity."

"I suppose I was as loyal as was compatible with my ambition," answered Blanche, with a bitter laugh.

"You have always been loyal, Blanche; do not now be blind. If your husband were capable of what you suppose, an error on your part might be excusable in your own eyes; but you must commit no such mistake. He has done you no wrong in this respect."

Blanche dropped her weary hands. All that winter she had been haunted with terrible doubts, and had asked herself over and over again, if underneath her husband's extraordinary indulgence and persistency

there was not some frightful meaning. Now that this suspicion was removed, she uttered a long sigh of relief, but her irritation was not at once dissipated.

"Why has he come back?" whispered Madeline.

"Ah! How do I know?" answered Blanche, wringing her hands. "Possibly to torture a poor soul that is weary of struggling, weary of suffering!"

Madeline looked at her for a moment. Swift blushes passed over her friend's fair face, followed by waxen pallor.

"Come to my room," she said, drawing Blanche away. "Come, and let me show you some of my husband's papers."

Blanche instantly understood. The young widow wished to evoke the image of an honorable love, of a duty courageously accepted though it led to the tomb.

Blanche went with her friend.

CHAPTER XX.

“ON THE TERRACE.”

THE great clock at Mesnil slowly struck the hour of two. The sun shone with dazzling brilliancy on the garden, with its rose trees just bursting into bloom. The servants were moving busily about in the court-yard. An under-gardener was conscientiously raking the avenue, and the sound of his rake was painful from its sharp regularity. Blanche, standing looking out into the garden, half leaning against the long window, tapped impatiently on the greenish tinted glass with restless fingers. She was waiting. He would come, of course; if not, why had he returned from Vienna?

“Blanche!” said Madeline, in her gentle voice, “let us go out on the terrace.”

Madame de Dreux obeyed. She was so entirely determined to resist on important points that where trifles were involved she was ready to yield.

They seated themselves under an awning, which protected them from the sun. Madame Lecomte had ordered it to be put up, and in all probability had arranged it in such a way that it obstructed all view of the residence of Monsieur de Fresnes.

“It is something,” said Madeline, continuing a conversation which had that morning been begun in her

room; “it is something to live for an idea—a great idea. My husband lived for his work, and I, his widow, I live to make him known to our contemporaries. It is a great support, you see! And you?”

“I!” said Blanche, disdainfully. “I live for pride.”

“Pride, do you call it? I should give a very different name to the motive power of your life. I consider that you have simply guarded your dignity—that you have feared the smallest smirch on your purity more than many other women would dread a complete bath in the mud—and that it is your own great self-respect which has made you what you are, so strong and so elevated in principles and in acts.”

Blanche did not interrupt her friend. It is very sweet to hear words of heartfelt commendation, especially when we know that we deserve the praise.

“Women like yourself,” continued Madeline, “live a life so apart from all others, that they cannot conduct themselves in the same way—they are placed, as it were, upon a pedestal, where they must remain whether they like it or no, for those persons who have more or less resented their superiority will greet their fall with ferocious joy.”

“What does it matter!” cried Blanche. “Happiness is well worth paying for.”

“Happiness!” answered Madeline, in a low voice. “Is that what you call happiness? Is not happiness rather, consideration for those about us—fulfilment of our duties—the honor of our children?”

“Hush!” cried Blanche. “It is with similar

sophistry that Hindoo women are induced to burn themselves on the bodies of their husbands!"

"Is the honor of our children sophistry?" asked Madeline, in the same gentle voice.

A noise of wheels on the gravel was heard. Madame Lecomte turned pale. Blanche started up, and stood listening with lips apart.

A servant crossed the terrace with the slow dignity which he judged suitable to the occasion, and presented to Madame de Dreux the card of Monsieur de Fresnes.

"Show him in," said his mistress.

"What are you going to do?" asked Madeline, much troubled.

"I do not know!" answered Blanche, with a gesture of despair.

She entered the salon. Lucien stood awaiting her in the center of the room. He was horribly pale, but perfectly self-possessed. He bowed low before her.

Through the windows which looked out on the court Blanche saw a travelling carriage and four horses.

"I came back," he said, abruptly—"I came back because I could not live without you." He paused, and then continued in a voice which showed his emotion: "It seemed to me that you banished me without comprehending what was within the bounds of possibility. I do not wish you to remain under your husband's roof and be afraid to meet his eyes. I ask you to go with me where I can devote my whole life to you. My carriage awaits us. Come with me,

Blanche ; I love you with all my heart and soul. Let us go, at once and forever !"

She trembled from head to foot, and drew back.

"My children !" she gasped.

He made a little gesture of impatience.

"No matter what one does," he answered, "life is full of pain and sorrow. Your children belong to their father. We have no right to take them with us. Blanche, I love you ! What I have suffered in seeing you misunderstood and insulted I can never tell you, least of all here, but I have determined to put an end to it. Since I have been away, you have become daily more and more dear to me. You love me, I know ; tell me that I have not dreamed it."

"I love you," answered Blanche, in a dull, echoless voice. She hardly knew whether she was living or not.

"We can be happy," said De Fresnes ; "we shall be soon forgotten, for we shall ask nothing from any one. Ah ! Blanche, if I dared—if I dared to kneel at your feet, and compel you to look into my eyes, you would not be able to hesitate. But I cannot. Look at me, I implore you."

The doors of the salon, standing wide open, were now her best protection, for De Fresnes did not dare advance a step nearer.

"I am fully aware of what I am proposing to you to leave," he continued. "I know all the bitterness which would necessarily be the accompaniment of our flight, but you will be so happy, Blanche ! I will make

of your life one perpetual scene of enchantment. Is not happiness worth any price?"

Madeline now appeared on the threshold of the long glass door leading out upon the terrace.

"Not that of honor!" she said, in her soft voice.

"Leave me!" said Blanche, turning angrily upon her friend.

Madeline shook her head.

"Think," she continued; "think of the day when your name will be dishonored, your children given over to the guardianship of other hands, because your's are too stained to touch them. I know, widow as I am, what it is to be respected. Could you endure contempt?"

"Hush!" cried Blanche, "hush! I will not hear you."

"No," said Monsieur de Fresnes, "listen to your friend; she is right. Before going away with me you ought deliberately to depict to yourself all the dangers, all the sorrows which you must endure. I will not urge you to go, contrary to your own judgment. The dangers are nothing, the sorrows will be quickly forgotten. I love you enough to assure you of that."

Blanche stretched out her arms to him. He took one step toward her, and then stopped, withheld by the respect inspired by Madeline. He took in his the two slender hands of Madame de Dreux, and pressing them to his heart, said in a voice that was thrilled with joy:

"Let us go!"

‘And if your husband kills him,’ said Madeline placing her cold hand on theirs.

Blanche tore herself away, and fled to the other end of the salon, where she stood panting, supporting herself against the wall.

“Ah!” she moaned, “ah! Madeline, you are stronger than I—you have conquered!”

“Do not listen to her!” cried Lucien, as he hastened to her side.

Madame Lecomte quickly closed the doors of the salon, and then went back to Blanche.

“Monsieur de Dreux will kill you,” she said to Lucien, “or you will kill him. Think of the fate of this poor creature if you were to die. If it is he who is killed, can you live happily with the mother of the two orphans? Go—Life has bitter battles for you to fight, and you will act your part, valiantly, no doubt; but do not compel this most unhappy woman to struggle with shame and dishonor. Such a course is worthy neither of you nor of her!”

“Is this your opinion?” asked Monsieur de Fresnes, bowing low before Madame de Dreux.

“Go,” she said. “I can not think of your life endangered for my sake. I shall never cease to love you, but it must be at a distance.”

He snatched her hand and pressed it to his lips, but he had lost his power over her.

With a parting salutation to Madeline, he crossed the salon; on the threshold he turned.

“Farewell, forever?” he asked.

“Forever!” was her reply.

He departed, and in another moment the carriage rolled past the windows.

“You are saved!” cried Madeline, taking Blanche in her arms.

“At the price of my utter misery for the rest of my life!” she answered, without returning her friend’s embrace.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THEY did not speak again for some time. Blanche had thrown herself into an arm-chair, utterly exhausted by the frightful shock she had undergone. Madeline dared neither to leave her nor to go near her.

A long time must elapse before we can thank our friends who prevent us from committing a fault; at first we can but rebel against their interference.

The afternoon slowly passed away. Twice Madeline went out to give certain orders and to spare Blanche. A less sensible woman, or a woman who was fond of scenes, would have sent for the children. Madeline, on the contrary, kept them away, as she did not wish to weaken the impression then stronger in the mind of her friend than any other, or than all others—that in going away with Lucien she would certainly have caused her own death, if not that of Lucien.

The dinner hour approached, and just before it was announced, the sound of a carriage renewed all Madeline's anxiety. Blanche, who seemed in a torpor, did not even hear it. Madeline ran out on the terrace to forbid another visit from Monsieur de Fresnes—for she was certain this visitor could be none other than he.

A carriage had driven up, but it was not the one which had been there a few hours before. It was a little calèche, white with dust, and instead of Lucien's handsome head, Madeline saw Mullan's brown moustache emerge from under the hood.

"Is it you!" cried Madeline, in great amazement.

"Myself! dear Madame."

"And whence came you? What a state you are in!"

"You mean as regards dust? It is quite possible. I have come by post from Paris."

A nervous twitching of the mouth disturbed Mullan's moustache. He shook himself violently before he ascended the steps.

"A hundred and ten leagues," he said, "justifies a little dust. Who is at the château?"

"No one."

"Is Madame de Dreux at home?"

"Of course," answered Madeline, who began to feel a little nervous.

"Ah! I am delighted to hear it. My friend, De Dreux, is close at my heels. I was a few hours in advance when I left Paris, but I lost them, and down below in the valley I caught a glimpse of his carriage. But my horses are good, and I drove at full speed."

By this time they were in the small salon, and there Mullan stopped short, and taking Madeline's hand, he said, looking her full in the eyes:

"Monsieur de Fresnes?"

"He started to-day, about two o'clock, on a long

journey. He paid Madame de Dreux a farewell visit, at which I was present."

"Has he gone then? Gone for good?"

"Most certainly!"

Mullan passed his hand over his brow.

"I am thankful," he said, in a less excited tone. "It was not precisely for my own amusement that I have run this race with De Dreux; you may readily believe this."

He dropped the hand of Madame Lecomte, which during this dialogue he had pressed so strongly that he hurt her, without either of them perceiving it.

"She will certainly be surprised," he said, without naming Blanche, "but she ought to be warned. Guy, as I told you, is only an hour behind me—perhaps even less."

They entered the salon, the doors of which Madeline opened after Lucien's departure.

Blanche rose, and stood petrified.

"Mullan!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Mullan, and I precede your husband—"

"My husband?" said Blanche, "my husband! is he coming here?"

"Yes, within an hour. The notion took him night before last. Where he had been, I know not. He came and told me of his intention. As soon as he left me, I started without waiting for morning."

Blanche looked earnestly at him. Suddenly she snatched his arm.

"I am suspected—accused?" she said, between her teeth.

Mullan shrugged his shoulders. The fingers of Madame de Dreux tightened their grasp.

"Lazy people," he said, with a faint smile, "lazy people, you know, talk too much—laziness is the root of all vices."

"This is no time for such idle jests," said Madame de Dreux, looking at him with eyes flashing with anger. "He has been told that Monsieur de Fresnes was here?"

"Yes, said Mullan, instantly deciding on his course.

"And are you not ashamed," she said, "to come, you two men, to spy upon me in this way?"

He interrupted her with a somewhat peremptory gesture. She loosened her grasp, and stood silent before him.

"We did not come to watch you, dear Madame," said he. "Guy came in hot haste to kill Monsieur de Fresnes, and I preceded him to spare him that trouble, by doing it myself, if it were needful."

He hesitated, and abandoning the half-sarcastic, half-jesting tone, which was habitual to him, he added, slowly:

"I was desirous, if possible, to avoid a catastrophe which was to be deplored in every point of view!"

Blanche, greatly humiliated, durst not lift her eyes before this friend and guardian—Madeline had disappeared.

"I was ready," he continued, "to do this or anything else for you. To serve you is always a joy to me. I am glad to see that the motives, the dismal

fears, which led me to undertake so long a journey, were the merest chimeras."

"You are mistaken!" said Blanche, throwing back her head haughtily. "I love Monsieur de Fresnes."

"I know it," answered her friend, "and I knew it before you yourself did. Only let me advise you not to say as much to Guy; he would not appreciate the chivalric grandeur of such an avowal. So far as I am concerned, it is a different thing. I am the friend of bad days—I can understand everything, hear everything, and admire everything." He added, in a low voice: "He is not coming back, is he?"

Blanche shook her head.

"You are a noble woman!" he exclaimed.

"No," answered Blanche, "I am not, but," pointing to Madeline, who at that moment entered, "but she is!"

CHAPTER XXII.

GUY ARRIVES.

AN hour later, the great calèche of Monsieur de Dreux rolled noisily into the court-yard. The servants, who had been forewarned, ran to meet their master, and Guy, with a cloudy and frowning brow, passed through their lines without realizing that this welcome indicated more anxiety than surprise.

Guy was deep in perplexing thought. Two hours previously he had met the calèche of Monsieur de Fresnes. That gentleman had favored him with a polite salutation. This chance meeting seemed to complicate matters, and he felt that he had stumbled into an abyss of perplexities.

"Where is Madame?" he asked of a servant.

"In the dining-room, sir; they are at dinner," answered the man, respectfully.

They were dining at Mesnil—yes, precisely as if the day had not been full of terrific storms. Monsieur de Dreux went to the dining-room, from the open doors of which came odors that told of good cheer, and sitting in the full blaze of the lamp he saw Mullan.

Guy did not believe in ghosts, and yet he stood petrified. He had left Mullan forty-eight hours before in a comfortable smoking-room in Paris, where he had heard much good advice.

"Good evening," said his friend, as he replaced on the table the glass which he had just emptied.

The servants placed a chair at the table. Guy seated himself, and mechanically unfolded his napkin, which was arranged in advance for him. He looked around the table. Everything seemed much as usual. There were, to be sure, dark circles around the eyes of Blanche, while those of Madeline were extraordinarily brilliant. Mullan had an odd little expression, which reminded one of a cat mischievously playing with a spool of cotton. A plate of hot soup was placed in front of Monsieur de Dreux. All at once Guy seemed to realize the rudeness of which he was guilty. He rose from his chair with some precipitation.

"Pray forgive me," he said. "The rapidity of my journey has fairly stunned me. I have forgotten everything."

He made the tour of the table with considerable grace—he kissed the hand of each of the two ladies, and shook that of Mullan—after which ceremony he seated himself, and looking around the table said aloud:

"It is your presence, Mullan, which so astonishes me. I believed you to be in Paris at this moment. How happens it that you are here?"

"It is a most simple matter!" answered his friend. "When you told me the other night that you were coming, I laid a wager with myself that I would arrive at Mesnil before you. I have won my bet, you see, but only by a half hour, I regret to say."

Guy, considerably vexed at having no reason for anger, swallowed his soup without another word. No one wished to talk—not even Mullan, who thought the situation irresistibly comic. After the anxiety of his hurried journey, wherein he had spared neither himself nor his horses, the presence of his friend at this table, waited upon by assiduous and solemn servants, inspired him with a mad desire to laugh aloud, and all the more when he thought of Monsieur de Fresnes travelling post haste to Paris all alone.

Alone! Oh, what joy!

At this moment everything was *couleur de rose* to this young man, who, in thinking over his own promptness and energy in this matter, could with difficulty refrain from showing the satisfaction he felt.

Guy could not recover as easily from the shock he had experienced at this unexpected result. When a man hurries away from Paris, with the intention of killing some one at the end of his journey, and instead assists at a great family dinner; when, too, as a finishing touch, a man sees with his own eyes his enemy voluntarily turning his back on the place where he was to be driven forth, there is something extremely discomfoting in such a termination.

When dinner was over, Mullan drew from his pocket a case of delicious cigars. After selecting one, he handed the case to his friend.

"You went off so hurriedly," he said, "that I am quite certain you forgot to take any cigars."

Monsieur de Dreux accepted the civility with a

sulky air. The two men went out on the terrace, the night was very dark, and the lighthouse shone against the horizon in alternate brightness and obscurity.

"Will you kindly explain to me," said the Deputy, "the meaning of this journey of yours? I do not care to be laughed at—"

"Never mind that," answered Mullan, passing his arm through that of Monsieur de Dreux. "I came that I might laugh a little at you, and I am quite sure that you are too much a friend of mine to refuse me this innocent pleasure. I saw you day before yesterday armed to the teeth, ready to fight any windmills which you might chance to see. I was frightened out of my wits, not for the windmills, but for you. You know that as a rule it is not the windmills which suffer in such encounters. I came to prevent you from making yourself ridiculous, and perhaps worse."

Guy attempted to shake off his friend's arm.

"Why did Monsieur de Fresnes come here?" he asked.

"Probably to procure some papers from his own house. I can think of no other reason to explain his sudden arrival and equally sudden departure."

"He loves my wife—of that I am sure," said Guy.

"It is some woman who has put that notion into your head," Mullan replied.

"What does that matter, so long as it is true?" answered Monsieur de Dreux, with some irritation.

"What does it matter if it be true and if your wife

does not love him? If she loved him, he certainly would not have left here as he did four hours ago."

"I met him," said Guy, artlessly.

Mullan dropped his friend's arm, and lifted his hands to Heaven.

"What candor. What divine simplicity! You met him on his way to Paris, which proves to you, of course, that he and your wife intend to betray you! It strikes me that if such were the case the gentleman would have remained here, where no one surely had the smallest expectation of seeing you. Do you suppose I warned him, and sent him off?"

"No," said Guy; "you did not get here soon enough for that. I thought it all out."

"You think of everything!" said Mullan, in a tone of intense admiration. "But let me beg of you not to apologize to your wife, for she would never forgive your suspicions."

"But why should I not apologize?" asked Guy. "Why should I blush to excuse myself? I should certainly have killed this man if I had found him here, and I see no harm in telling her so."

Mullan shrugged his shoulders.

"Man is naturally blind and deaf; but when he is a Deputy, the votes of his constituents finish the work, and render him absolutely incapable of judgment. Can not you see how much better it would be could Madame de Dreux pretend to be ignorant of your suspicions. It would be infinitely more delicate on your part than to tell her what you have been fool-

ish enough to imagine. This would be an offence which she would never forgive, and I am inclined to think that your conjugal list is already quite long enough."

"You really think so?" said De Dreux, somewhat troubled.

"Certainly—only, my dear friend, do not do this thing. I assure you that I, for one, don't like such explanations."

"Nor I, either!" answered Guy, with a sigh.

After a long silence, he added,

"What, then, shall I say to Blanche in explanation of my arrival?"

"Tell her that it was too warm in Paris; that the air did not agree with you, now that the spring has really come in. That will do. I will see that she asks you no questions."

De Dreux, reconciled with Mullan, with Monsieur de Fresnes and with life, would have liked, also to be reconciled with his wife; but the time for reconciliation and armistices was over, and he felt that under the kind manner of Blanche was concealed so firm a determination to keep him at a distance, that in a fortnight he returned to Paris.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

THE summer took its course, and le Mesnil was crowded, as usual, with visitors. Monsieur de Grosmont came to pay his annual visit to his ward, and complimented her on the generous conduct of her husband in the De Fresnes affair.

At this name Blanche frowned, which her ex-guardian seeing, hastened to add:

"I regret, my dear child, that you have never rendered justice to the merits of this great statesman, who is, beside, one of the most amiable men in the world. Your coldness toward him has always been a thorn in the side of your husband, and a hindrance to his political advancement. Now, of course, it does not so much matter, as it is certainly to diplomacy that Monsieur de Fresnes intends to devote his life, and in this cause he could not, were he ever so much inclined, be of much service to your husband."

Blanche listened to this discourse without flinching. She had ceased to be astonished at anything. The Comtesse Praxis arrived to spend two months, declaring that she came in pursuit of Mullan, who had left Paris in such haste, that she could not obtain a substitute for a whole week, and so lost her bezique.

She was a clear, sharp-sighted woman, and her old

heart had ached many a time for Blanche. Many an anxious hour had she passed in thinking over the snares and possible temptations in the path of her young friend. The only man, however, in their circle, on whom her suspicions had not momentarily fallen was precisely Monsieur de Fresnes. The honor of Madame de Dreux was now safe, the two friends who held her secret, Madeline and Mullan, feigned to forget it, and she soon lifted her head and carried it as proudly as ever; in her heart, however, she was bitterly humiliated and crushed. The quality which she had always greatly lacked was indulgence and charity for sinners.

She had in past days felt so keen a sense of her superiority over other women, that she kept them at a distance, treating them, in fact, as if they were beings of an inferior order. The approach of danger, the consciousness that but for Madame Lecomte she would have fallen into an abyss which she once would have thought it impossible that her feet could ever lead her, inspired her with a tender pity for those who had yielded. It was in vain that she said to herself that Monsieur de Fresnes was very different from other men; she was too conscientious to accept such shallow reasoning, and she was compelled to admit to herself that if her error had not become a crime, it was simply because Madeline had stood between her and the gulf.

There was, then, at least, one woman who was her superior; one woman, too, who had never prided herself on her superiority, and who was wiser than

Blanche, more virtuous and more courageous. This was a great and useful lesson to Madame de Dreux. The only Christian virtue that she lacked, that of Humility, now entered her repentant soul and caused her thenceforward to be very gentle to those who fell in the battle of Life.

With the autumn came the anniversary of the tempest in which Gerard perished. Accompanied by all the inhabitants of the village, the two women assisted at a funeral mass, and when the cemetery was again deserted and left to its calm and peaceful solitude, they turned toward the grave.

Roses had wandered all over it, and pale pink blossoms half-concealed the name of the young hero.

"You see," said Madeline, "I at first believed that every hope and light of life lay buried there. I was utterly wretched, and Death would have been most gladly welcomed. When I read the words he had written, I saw that I understood them, and that it was possible for me to make others do the same, and then I realized that my husband was not altogether lost to me and to the world. He lives still in his works—he speaks to me all the time that I sit at his desk, and the thought that through me his great ambition will be fulfilled, has inspired me with a desire to live. To arrive at the end which I now propose to myself, I have much to learn, much work to do. I am very ignorant, but I can do it. I can learn all that I ought to know. Will you believe me when I tell you that I am now haunted by one fear, that of dying before I

have finished my self-appointed task—before I have published these two volumes, which are Gerard's very self?"

Blanche pressed her friend's hand.

"I understand you," she said, "and in spite of your great sorrow, I feel that life has still in store for you great joys. Ah!" she added, with a sigh, "my existence has no such noble aim and no such consolations. My dream has perished—Madeline, what Future have I a right to expect?"

"Do like me, work," answered Madame Lecomte. They slowly returned to the château. Blanche was deep in thought. After a long silence, she turned to her friend:

"Yes, you are right," she said. "Work might now be my salvation. But I have organized my life in such a fashion that it is impossible to work for myself. If the day should ever come when I should issue some work, scientific or political, or merely one of light literature, if it were worthy of attention and attracted it, all that I have done in the last ten years to persuade the world that my husband is an eagle, would become utterly useless. I have no right to inflict this humiliation on Guy. He is not unkind to me, not wilfully so, I mean; he loves me after his own fashion; it is not his fault that he is not the eagle he is supposed to be; it is mine. It would be a most gratuitous piece of hatefulness to precipitate him from the empyrean in which he now soars.

"I have placed him there; there he must remain.

It does not please me, after all, to tell the world that ten years ago I committed, in marrying, the most common mistake, and also the most terrible one that can fall to a woman's lot.

"I do not choose to admit that my intelligence and my education were not sufficient to prevent me from marrying a man only because he was handsome, because he talked with agreeable fluency, and had excellent manners. This would be to me a most cruel humiliation. Guy now passes for a man of superior ability, and he must preserve this reputation to the end."

"And if you die before him?" said Madeline.

Blanche smiled with infinite sweetness.

"They will only say that his grief for me is so great that he is not himself, that he is incapable of exertion," she replied. "You are astonished I see. You did not think me capable of such kindly sentiments toward my husband? I have questioned myself, and feel thoroughly how guilty I am in regard to him. Society so readily pardons a man's sins, that it would be folly on my part to exact from a man who has no higher idea of right and wrong than the laws of the world in which he has been educated, a propriety of conduct which would make him almost ridiculous. Some men, I believe, have but one love in their lives. Your husband was one of these. Such men are most fortunate, and much to be envied, but few are capable of imitating them. My poor husband was, therefore, perfectly right according to his light, when he came post haste

from Paris to kill the man whom he supposed on certain terms of intimacy with me. It was not he who did this, it was the man who has been fashioned by the world, and I understand it perfectly."

After a long silence, she began :

"I am guilty toward him. You remember that I really believed for a time that he closed his eyes to all that he did not care to see. You know, and I now know, that my suspicion was unjust. I owe him, therefore, some compensation, and I shall pay my debt in full."

They had reached the château by this time, and stopped before the long windows leading into the salon.

"I neither ask nor expect happiness in this world," continued Madame de Dreux. "It deserted me when the man I loved left that room, never to return. You go to a grave and there weep for your husband; I come here and feel that I must kneel on that very spot, and weep tears of agony. He came to me like an angel to a prisoner, bringing a hope of freedom. But have no fear, Madeline. My life lies plain before me now, as do my duties. My resolution is taken, and I shall not waver."

Madame de Dreux appeared in the world more beautiful and more brilliant than ever.

Monsieur de Fresnes, who had spent but a few hours in Paris, was far away on a diplomatic mission of great importance and delicacy. The vague rumor which had sent Monsieur de Dreux in such hot haste

to Mesnil, was given the lie by the presence in Paris, the very next day, of the young ambassador, and died away as do so many things of a similar character.

Many exquisite and noticeable fêtes were given that winter at the Hôtel de Dreux. Nothing that Blanche did was commonplace, and her reputation was now more firmly established than ever as a woman of infinite taste.

Meanwhile, her beauty acquired a new and more touching charm. The tender compassion she had learned to feel for the errors of humanity, made itself apparent in her words, and men were irresistibly attracted by her, but all their attentions were thrown away.

Madame de Dreux moved cold and stately amid all this homage. She was, to be sure, less disdainful and more gentle than before, but she was equally inaccessible.

Mullan had voluntarily relinquished his rôle as watch-dog; he knew that he had nothing to guard, and that this heart—this precious treasure—had flown far away, and was following him who had won it.

Five years later, one evening, Blanche was waiting for her carriage at the opera. She was standing on the staircase, surrounded by pretty women in charming toilettes. All were talking as only people can talk who belong to the same circles of society. Guy was devoting himself to a fair young bride, who was so reckless in her conduct that she needed careful surveillance from her husband.

Blanche scarcely heard the compliments addressed to herself by a man whose flattery was of the most pointed description.

She looked around, nodding here and there. Suddenly she caught her breath, as her eyes were arrested by the profile of a man on the opposite staircase, and her heart began to beat with all the passionate vehemence of those old days. She had never thought to feel these fierce throbbings again. She believed her love was dead; that it had burnt itself out, and had died like a fire extinguished from want of air. She knew now how great had been her mistake.

The man at whom she was gazing with her soul in her eyes, turned and made her a most respectful salutation. She returned it, and at the same moment, involuntarily took her husband's arm. Just then the crowd below moved a little, and she was able to descend a few steps.

"De Fresnes!" said Guy, looking across to the other staircase. "Where on earth did he come from? No one has seen him for a whole century. Look at him; he blazes with orders. Upon my word, Blanche, he has as many diamonds on his coat as you wear on your throat."

The two men exchanged bows. If some officious person had then and there reminded Guy that he had driven one hundred and ten leagues to kill the man whom he now saw opposite him, he would have been greatly surprised. As to De Fresnes, he of course had no idea of this bellicose expedition.

The ladies who were with the diplomatist descended the stairs, and he followed, but with one last look at Madame de Dreux.

Blanche did not sleep that night. A singular jealousy assailed her in regard to the two strangers, with Lucien. She wondered who they were, and what they were to him. She could easily have discovered, but she would not ask a single question.

About twilight, at the hour when Monsieur de Fresnes had been in the habit of calling, she was tempted to give orders to the servant to admit visitors, but she did not dare to do this. She remained in her own chamber, where, seated near the window, she could see every guest who approached. It was growing dark; the servant came out and lighted the lanterns on either side the entrance.

Presently she saw a tall, elegant looking man ascend the steps. She recognized him instantly. He gave his card to the valet, and then looked up with evident uneasiness at the dark and silent windows.

Blanche felt as if he must have seen her through the curtains, as after one lingering glance he turned away.

"And with you goes my heart," said Blanche to herself; "my heart, my soul, my life itself! You bear them all with you, and yet you know it not! And I thought I had forgotten you! Can a woman ever forget? Can a woman ever cease to suffer? To see him, to spend one hour with him, would be bliss itself! I love him!"

She rang the bell violently.

"Run after the visitor who just left a card here. Tell him it was a mistake, and that your mistress begs him to return."

The woman who received this order was utterly confounded; the room was very dark, and she could not see the agitated face of her mistress.

"Go!" said Blanche, peremptorily; "and make haste."

The girl obeyed. She ran across the court-yard, and then stopped, undecided. It was cold; a fine rain had begun to fall. She went back to her mistress.

"Madame, the gentleman was too far away," she said. "I could see no one."

"Very well," said Madame de Dreux.

The woman went for a light, and Blanche replaced in her wardrobe the shawl, the hat, and the purse which she had taken out after she sent for Monsieur de Fresnes. If, as five years before, he had said to her "Let us go," she would have gone.

"I am mad!" she said to herself, when the room flooded with light, restored her to her senses. "What am I to do, what is to become of me, if this mere glimpse of him affects me in this way?"

She wept her heart away—more for the days that were gone than for the present; then, the next day appeared in the world as if nothing had happened.

Monsieur de Fresnes was in Paris for a very brief time, and in a few days she heard that he had gone again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE END.

YEARS pass away; our hair grows white, and in the wear and hurry of life we do not realize that old age is upon us, unless children growing up and around us, mark the flight of Time.

Blanche was still beautiful, Guy was still eloquent and agreeable; but their son Edward was twenty-seven, and about to be married; their daughter Claire was a wife and the mother of two little girls who were wonderfully like Blanche. The Comtesse Praxis had been dead a long time. Madame Lecomte had published her husband's works, and Paris, miscalled frivolous and heartless, had not admiration enough to lay at the feet of the noble widow who had consecrated herself to the memory of Gerard Lecomte. As to Mullan, he was becoming a little gouty, but he adored Claire's children, and asked, he said, no other happiness in this world than to be looked upon by them as a grandfather.

One day Guy came home far from well. He had never been ill in his life, and did not believe in illness, and yet he was now obliged to succumb. Three days later his condition excited the gravest apprehensions in the minds of his physicians, who felt it their duty to inform Madame de Dreux of the imminence of the danger.

She bowed her head with the resignation which for a long time had been her distinguishing characteristic. She had always expected to die before her husband, and that thought had been one of the engrossing anxieties of her life. Guy had, as he grew older, become more obstinate and more and more satisfied with himself; more than once had Blanche found it very difficult to prevent her husband from committing some frightful blunder, and the political troubles since 1847 had in a great measure contributed to disturb and unsettle more solid heads than that of Monsieur de Dreux.

She was, nevertheless, attached to her husband, in spite of all his errors. She had become accustomed to him, and he was the father of her two children who had never, in their lives, heard one word of dissension between their parents.

Blanche, who had a great regard for the duties of parents toward their children, felt that entire union between husband and wife, if only in appearance, is the first and only ground for filial respect. Therefore, whatever might be the real differences between herself and Monsieur de Dreux, she took care to conceal them from the world, and more especially from her children. Consequently, they were always respectful to their father, while of their love for herself she was sure.

By the bedside of this man she watched accordingly with sincere affection, although he had made her life one of constant abnegation and sacrifice. Blanche

had no other sentiments toward him now than those natural to the most faithful and devoted of wives.

During his illness, which was brief, she answered all notes and found time to thank every one for flattering interest and attentions. When she heard allusions made to the loss to his country, of this intelligent and loyal man, she was able to reply with dignity and calmness, and never by word or look betrayed her consciousness of the inanity of this much vaunted nature.

From her children, who were plunged into deep grief by the thought of losing such a father, she was able to conceal the dismal fact that this father had never troubled himself in any way about their education nor settlement in life, and that she alone had borne all the burthen.

To the Notary who, called to the sick bed, praised the admirable rendering of Guy's will, which he said was so clearly expressed that it was impossible for any mistake to be made, she did not say that this will was her work and not her husband's; that certain portions had cost her weeks and sometimes months of painful discussion with Guy.

Thus, up to the last hour of her husband's life, she maintained her falsehood, and he continued to pass for one of the most remarkable men of his time.

Guy passed away without suffering, as unconscious of the solicitude of his wife until he drew his last breath, as he had been of her watchful care during so many years. He had not time to thank her. Would

he have done so, if he had had time? It is by no means certain.

The funeral ceremonies were very imposing, as becomes great men. When the hearse left the door, Blanche, whom etiquette commanded to remain under her own roof, slowly walked through the vast rooms where her life had been passed—her life so free in appearance, so cloistered in reality—by the necessity of bearing the weight of this stupendous imposture.

Laying aside the thought of him who had just been borne from her house, and to whom at that moment the church and the world were paying the most brilliant homage, she thought of herself. Since the day when she had bestowed on Monsieur de Dreux her fortune and herself, she felt that she had done all in her power for him, “and now!” she sighed, “now I am free! I can be myself and act in my own name. I can at least live without lying!”

She drew a long breath. It seemed to her that a new Blanche was born—a Blanche who would be a personality, who might be permitted to act out her own ideas.

She spent two hours in this singular state, which was a kind of intoxication similar to that felt by persons restored to liberty when age and long captivity have tempered the hot impulses of their youth.

A noise of carriages rolling up to the door aroused her from her brief stupor. She rose from her chair and went forward to meet the son who was to bring her the last news of her husband.

"Dear mother," said Edward, tenderly; "we know what you have lost; we know how superior our father was to all other men. We will love you enough to induce you to forget how immeasurably we are his inferiors."

"We will talk of my father every day," said Claire. "You will tell us of his noble life, of his great works, and of all that this great man and good citizen did."

With the arms of her children around her, Blanche felt all her plans for her future crumble into dust. How could she show her own superiority now, without causing the world to suspect the truth. Would not it be at once seen by her children that it was she who had toiled for their welfare? No, their respect for his memory must remain undiminished.

"Yes, my children," she said, "we will talk of him daily, in order to make even stronger the veneration and love you now feel for his memory."

Madame de Dreux contented herself, therefore, with being an irreproachable woman and an adorable grandmother. Among the habitués of her house there were often allusions made to the merits of her dead husband. A faint smile quivered on the lips of Mullan and Madeline, who exchanged a look, but Blanche seemed perfectly unconscious.

The first time she returned to Paris, after Guy's death, Monsieur de Fresnes made her a formal offer of his hand.

"We are too old," she said; "my hair is gray; my children would accuse me of lacking respect for the

memory of their father. Let us remain friends; it will be less ridiculous."

They are friends, but they see each other rarely; they fear, old as they are, that they would suffer too much were they to meet too often.

THE END.


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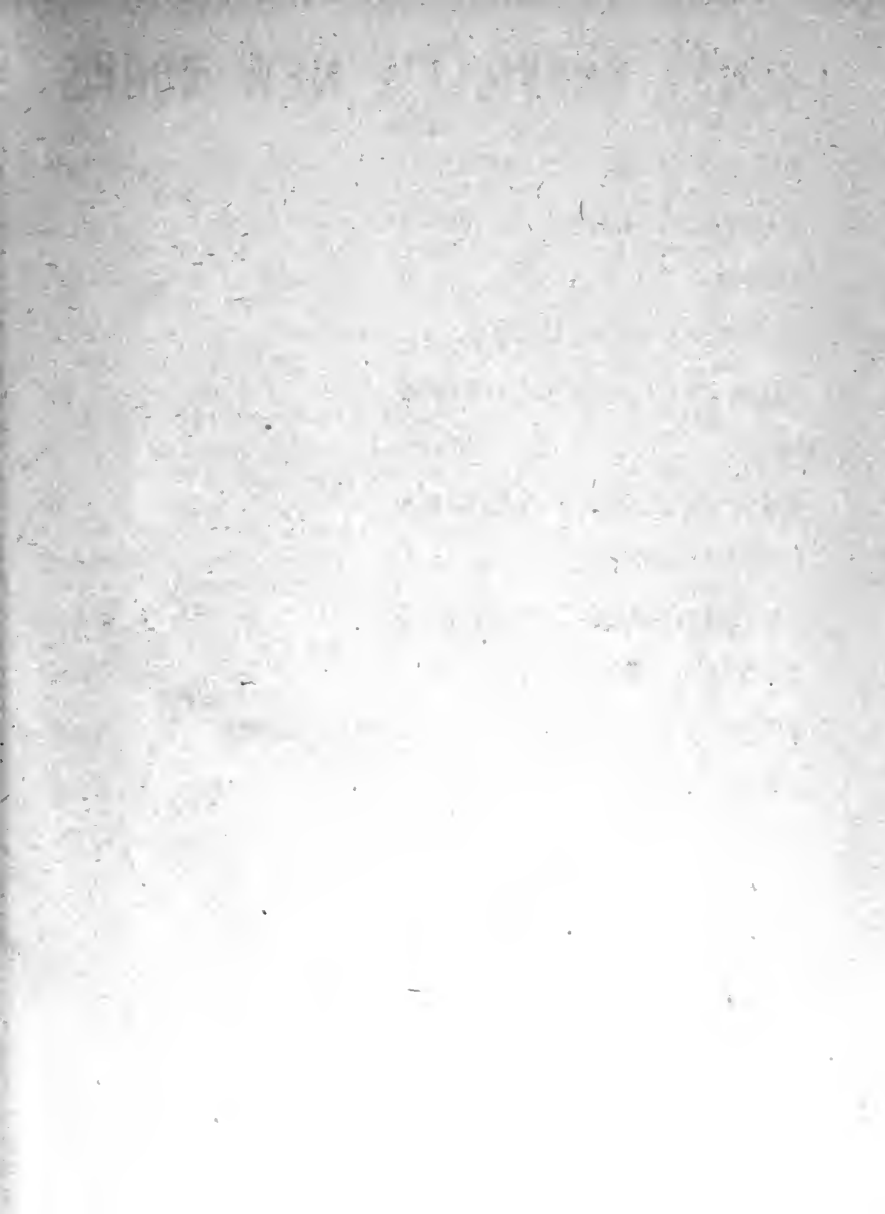
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